

**Liparu Lyetu – Our Life**

**Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking  
in Applied Contexts**

Dissertation

zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde

durch den

Promotionsausschuss Dr. phil.

der Universität Bremen

vorgelegt von

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Hamburg, den 23. April 2015

*I dedicate this dissertation to Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba.  
Without them, the films that form the basis of this work would not have  
been possible.*

*The film  
Liparu Lyetu – Our Life  
can be viewed here:  
[http://www.ethnofilm.de/our\\_life](http://www.ethnofilm.de/our_life)*



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## Acknowledgements

As is the case with many doctoral theses, this one would not have been possible without the work, feedback and support provided by others.

First of all I would like to thank my first supervisor, Prof. Dorle Dracklé of Bremen University, who has supported and guided my work since the shooting of my very first anthropological film more than ten years ago. Since then she has continued to encourage me to combine my filmmaking with an academic career. When I was given the opportunity to do this research, she immediately offered me the institutional backing to implement it. Since the start of the project Dorle Dracklé has given me a tremendous amount of academic feedback and personal support.

I also want to thank Prof. Peter Ian Crawford, who has been a long time film-festival friend and mentor. I am indebted to him for his ongoing support regarding my own filmmaking, and for many insightful conversations about ethnographic filmmaking in general. As the second supervisor of this dissertation project, he gave me very insightful comments regarding my work.

My great thanks go to Simone Pfeiffer and Kathrin Wildner, who read the entire manuscript of this dissertation and gave tremendously helpful and critical comments at every stage. Their feedback – complementary on more than one occasion – has improved this work significantly. Moreover, I would like to thank them for their emotional support during the time of writing.

As for the colleagues and associates who have supported and fostered my work on this project, I am indebted to Thomas Falk for inviting me into his sub-project team at *The Future Okavango* research project and for his support during our research. Moreover, I would like to offer my thanks to my *The Future Okavango* colleagues, especially Stephanie Domptail, Laura Grosse and Jan Wehberg. I also want to thank all my colleagues from Bremen University for their kindness and support. I am especially indebted to the participants of the *bik Werkstatt*, where I presented and discussed aspects of my work in January 2011.

Special thanks also to Michael Pröpper for his collaboration during the production of *Wiza Wetu*, and to Ute Schmiedel, who was a great partner during the production of *Bridging the Gap* and an overall supporter of my filmmaking for BIOTA and TFO.

I am most grateful to the workshop participants and co-directors of *Bridging the Gap*: Reginald A. Christiaan, Richard S. Isaacks, Donna Kotze, Marianna Johanna Lot, Snake Vilho Mtuleni, Weynand Pieters, Jeanette Swartbooi and Sebedeus Swartbooi. My very special thanks go to the participants of the film *Liparu Lyetu*: Clementine Shimbumburu Hamutenya, Thobias K. Immanuel, Veronica Ngundi Kapumburu, Samwel T. Kwandu, Johannes Mashare, Angeline K. Simata, and Christofine Zangata. In addition, I want to thank all the other people who have made these films possible through volunteering as protagonists.

My thanks to Beate Engelbrecht for her longstanding support of my work as a filmmaker. As one of the convenors of the *Visual Anthropology Workshop* at the *Centro Incontri Umani* in Ascona in August 2011, she has given me the opportunity to present and discuss my film, *Liparu Lyetu*. Big thanks also go to all the workshop organisers, discussants and participants for their insightful comments.

My great thanks to Michaela Schäuble, Michael Pröpper and Oliver Hinkelbein for reading and commenting on different parts of this dissertation. Antonia Scholkmann has given me the necessary guidance throughout the ups and downs of the writing process with her insightful comments on the particularities of doing PhD research and academia more generally. Michaela Appelles has contributed to some of the technical aspects of the production.

Last but not least, I thank my partner Alexandra Mankarios for her great support during the many months of filming, reading and writing for this dissertation. Her insightful comments on my filmmaking and writing have enhanced both sides. Alexandra has not only read and commented on considerable portions of my

dissertation and helped with its “post-production”, but also taken great care of our daughter Louise during my many work-related absences both during filming and writing.

Among all those not mentioned here in person, I would like to thank my family and all my friends and colleagues who made this dissertation possible, whether through discussions, feedback or comments on my work, or by providing motivation and emotional support.

Martin Gruber, April 2015

## **1. Introduction and Outline: What does “participatory” mean?**

Participation and collaboration have become buzzwords in visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking.<sup>1</sup> Scholars and filmmakers increasingly describe their own or other people’s activities as participatory, collaborative, cooperative or shared. These labels are often applied to authenticate or legitimise this work; yet, the practices and underlying intentions, methods and theories often remain obscure. However, the inclusion of protagonists in the process of filmmaking goes back to the beginnings of ethnographic filmmaking and such seminal figures as Robert Flaherty and Jean Rouch. While contemporary anthropologists and filmmakers refer to these traditions<sup>2</sup> and experiment with participatory approaches in different ways, participatory filmmaking in general has been characterised by a lack of theoretical or methodological discussion and rigour. This imbalance is reflected by the situation in development<sup>3</sup> cooperation, in which participation has become a “new tyranny”: now an inevitable element of any major project, it is arguably a means of legitimising and implementing decisions already made by those in power (Cooke & Kothari 2004a). This paradoxical situation constitutes the background of my ongoing work as an ethnographic filmmaker for various development and research projects. A great interest in ethnographically informed films, “stakeholder<sup>4</sup> inclusion” and participation is paralleled by a lack of certainty as to what participatory filmmaking actually implies, what it can achieve and what impact it has on the

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term “film” to encompass work captured on celluloid film as well as various video formats. 16 mm film was common in documentary filmmaking until from the 1980s onwards it began to be replaced by cheaper and more accessible electronic visual recording technology. Today different video formats are commonly used in documentary filmmaking.

<sup>2</sup> I am aware that any “tradition” is socially constructed in order to establish continuity with the past (see Hobsbawm 1992). Examples of how references to “traditional” aspects of culture are employed will be addressed throughout this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Within this dissertation the term “development” is used to encompass the discourses and practices of the related fields of “development studies” and “development cooperation”. It is beyond the focus of this dissertation, to provide a comprehensive critique of the notion of “development”. For an example see Ferguson (2007).

<sup>4</sup> The term “stakeholders” is borrowed from development-parlance (see for example FAO 2012). In the context of this dissertation, it is used accordingly to refer to any group or individual affected by or with an interest in a project.

respective project. To address this uncertainty is the principal aim of this ethnographic enquiry. With the following it is my intention to contribute to a much-needed conceptual and methodological discussion and clarification of participatory filmic practices, with a focus on applied research.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this contribution is to describe and analyse the emergence of the practice of *participatory ethnographic filmmaking*, an approach I developed over ten years of work as an ethnographic filmmaker, mostly in an applied context. The main focus is the production of the film *Liparu Lyetu – Our Life* (Gruber et al. 2011), which serves as both an object of inquiry in the written thesis and as a self-standing product submitted as a practical component of this dissertation. *Liparu Lyetu* shows the role played by natural resources in the livelihoods of rural people in Northern Namibia. The 32 minute-long film was conceived and shot by a group of villagers from the Mashare Area. Two Namibian co-workers and I trained the participants<sup>6</sup> in the technical aspects of filmmaking and moderated the process. It is the first of three films planned for *The Future Okavango* (TFO)<sup>7</sup> research project, investigating environmental change within the Okavango Basin, situated in Botswana, Angola and Namibia. Within the context of the project, the filmmaking process and the resulting films are intended to enhance the discussion between the various stakeholders and to communicate their perspectives to the project members and beyond (TFO 2009: 231).

Drawing on multiple ethnographic methods, it is my intention to capture the complex social, cultural and political dynamics leading to the production of the film, highlighting my role as a producer and facilitator of the process. *Liparu Lyetu* will serve as a case study, from which I will generalise in order to formulate

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<sup>5</sup> The interest in and need for critical discussion is illustrated by the recent symposium "Participatory – What does it mean?" held in conjunction with the Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival in May 2012 (see Bennet 2012).

<sup>6</sup> In the context of this dissertation, the term "participants" is used in a specific sense to refer to the various actors recruited for and directly involved in the filmmaking process.

<sup>7</sup> *The Future Okavango* refers to the Okavango River and its basin, using the name by which it is known in Botswana and internationally; the same river is called Kavango in the Kavango Region of Namibia. Its name in Angola is Cubango.



methodological insights that have potential applications beyond this particular instance. I will attempt thereby to gain a deeper understanding of the processes that unfold when disparate social actors involved in a film project actively participate in its making, and the ways in which these emerging patterns affect the research process. While my own participatory filmmaking has its foundation in anthropology, it has mainly been undertaken within applied contexts. With this dissertation, I want to contribute to participatory practices applicable in a wide range of situations, including anthropological research. The following questions guided my research:

1. What roles have participatory approaches played in visual anthropology and related disciplines, and how have these approaches evolved historically? In addressing these questions, I will discuss eminent concepts such as *participatory cinema* (MacDougall 2003a), *shared anthropology* (Rouch 2003), *participatory video* (PV) (White 2003d) and *collaborative filmmaking* (Ruby 1991, 1995; Elder 1995) as well as *indigenous media* (Ginsburg 1991).
2. How can these various methods and approaches be adapted and incorporated into applied research? I will describe and analyse the production of four different films in the attempt to answer these questions, with a central focus on the film *Liparu Lyetu*.
3. What are the consequences and implications of my work for other projects in the applied context, and for (anthropological) research in general?

I will investigate these questions by generalising from a number of central issues emerging from my work.

The dissertation is structured in six chapters: After this introduction, Chapter Two outlines the genesis and framework of the research as well as its underlying methods and data basis.

Chapter Three discusses participatory approaches from the field of ethnographic filmmaking and neighbouring disciplines in their historical context. The main focus is on the work of four eminent filmmakers: Robert Flaherty, Jean Rouch,

and David and Judith MacDougall. Their practices, to which many contemporary anthropological filmmakers refer in their own work, can be seen as characteristic of or even defining the discipline. The chapter concludes with the introduction of the two fields of indigenous media and participatory video (PV), with important links to anthropology and my own work. The field of indigenous media has given me important insights into the ways in which the medium can be introduced into relatively small-scale communities, especially in non-Western contexts.

Originating in development contexts, PV has served as one of the methodological foundations of my work. On the basis of this literature review a working framework for the assessment of participatory films will be developed, and working definitions of the relevant concepts will be established.

Chapter Four introduces three previous films, *Wiza Wetu* (2007), *Mema Eparu* (2008), and *Bridging the Gap* (2009) and illustrates how the production of each of these films was based on participatory methods borrowed from ethnographic filmmaking. Commissioned by research and development projects, these films were all produced in similar applied contexts, and the manner of their production formed the methodological basis of *Liparu Lyetu*.

Chapter Five deals with the film's content and context. It commences with an outline of the production's institutional setting, constituted by *The Future Okavango* research project and its underlying transdisciplinary research approach. This is then followed by a brief overview of the local setting, the Mashare Area of Northern Namibia. Intended to provide the relevant social and cultural background knowledge necessary to comprehend the means and methods of film production, it argues that resource use in the Kavango is still very much governed by Namibia's colonial past. The last section of this chapter is a detailed content description of *Liparu Lyetu*. This is mainly for the benefit of readers who do not have access to the film itself, but it also offers additional contextual information and interpretations.

Chapter Six encompasses the film's production. Structured in seven sub-chapters, arranged in largely chronological order, the different phases of the film's production are described and analysed: from the pre-investigation prior to

the production, through the setting up of a film workshop and participatory filming and editing, to the finished film's reception during village screenings and its use in project contexts. The ways in which the various actors shaped and contributed to the production in these different phases is the overarching theme of this chapter, which concludes with a summary and evaluation of the film, following the working framework for assessment introduced in Chapter Three. As the outcome of my research I will define the approach of *ethnographic participatory filmmaking* and propose an analytical framework for the evaluation of such films.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter of the dissertation summarises the most important findings of the work, situates it with reference to the literature, and offers a view of the ways in which participatory filmmaking may be applied in future projects.

## 2. Realisation, Methods and Data-Basis of the Research

My interest in participatory approaches began when I started making films for non-Western audiences in 2006. I was convinced that in order to make these films more accessible and worthwhile for Namibian audiences, it would be helpful to include local people in the films' production teams. My German co-director Michael Pröpper and I therefore cooperated closely with two Namibians throughout the entire production and distribution of *Wiza Wetu – Our Forest* (Pröpper & Gruber 2007), a political-ecological exploration of deforestation in the Kavango Region of northern Namibia. We also experimented with re-enactments, in which the protagonists portrayed certain aspects of their lives through performance. This method seemed to give them more space to express themselves and strengthen their position in the filming process than a realist documentary approach. I became increasingly interested in the potential of these methods, and continued to experiment with participatory approaches throughout my subsequent work. *Mema Eparu – Water is Life* (2008), was commissioned by a development project to promote the use of tap water to the dwellers of informal settlements in Rundu, in northern Namibia. Raphael Sinkumba, one of the locals with whom I worked on the previous film, took over important tasks during the production and became a co-director of the film. A significant shift occurred in 2008, when my commissioning co-director Ute Schmiedel and I decided to hand over important aspects of filmmaking to non-professionals at a more profound level. Inspired by participatory video (PV) methodology (Braden 1998), we conducted a film workshop during which Southern African members of the commissioning research project conceived and shot a film under our guidance. *Bridging the Gap – Para-ecologists in Action* (Schmiedel et al. 2009) depicts their work and their position within the project in an exaggerated and sometimes ironic way. Shifting of control over the film's content and style – and, even more importantly, its practical implementation – changed the roles within the production team. While Schmiedel and I became producers and trainers rather than the directors of the film, the participants gained (co)authorship, and perceived the resulting film much more as their own product. This seemed a

promising step towards more democratic and multi-vocal representations beyond the objectifying ethnographic gaze.

Ethnographic research always involves an encounter between the anthropologist and the participants of his or her research, and in most cases the ethnographer must negotiate within a complex social arena. As the initiator and main facilitator of the film workshop leading to *Liparu Lyetu*, I played a crucial role in the production of the film. Thus, unlike more conventional ethnographic research, which tends to be about what other people do or think, this study is to a great extent a reflection on my own activities. However, despite my own central position, I was only one of several actors involved in the filmmaking; others included workshop participants, film protagonists, various colleagues and co-workers and diverse local decision-makers. In order to understand the social and cultural dynamics unfolding during processes of participatory filmmaking, I will therefore focus on the entire social arena circumscribed by the filmmaking and describe and analyse my experiences with reference to the various actors involved. Following an interpretive approach, I will render a tangible narrative by evoking “thick” descriptions of those situations I consider especially significant for the film’s production (Geertz 1987). At the same time, an analysis of one’s own practices affords a high degree of reflexivity, which will be applied at all levels of knowledge production and representation in this dissertation (for example Clifford 1986).

Encompassing the production, presentation and consumption of anthropological knowledge, visual anthropology is often represented as consisting of two strands: the use of visual media in anthropological research on the one hand, and the study of visual systems or visual culture on the other (Banks & Morphy 1997: 1f). In practice, the two fields are inseparably entwined, as visual culture must be documented through still or moving images in order to be analysed (Postma & Crawford 2006a). The films discussed herein were not produced as part of ethnographic research, nor were they intended as such. I therefore consider them first and foremost as examples of a specific visual practice. However, the films draw on methods and approaches of ethnographic

filmmaking, and are therefore directly linked to methodological discussions in visual anthropology.

The notion of ethnographic filmmaking as an analytical process, generating anthropological knowledge represented in a resulting film, is widespread amongst anthropologists (Ruby 2000; Henley 2004; see also Morphy in Gruber 2006) and has recently been reaffirmed under the label *visual ethnography*: “When we use video as a research method we are not merely video-recording what people do in order to create visual data for analysis. Rather we are engaging in a process through which knowledge is produced” (Pink 2007: 105; see also Postma & Crawford 2006a). Originally, these assumptions were formulated with reference to the respective topics of filmmaking, with the resulting film representing the fieldwork experience (Ruby 2000: 266). The circumstances of my PhD research were somewhat different, since the film’s focus does not correspond with my main research interest. Following the aims and objectives of the larger project of which it forms a part, the film *Liparu Lyetu* deals with natural resources, while my academic interest is predominantly in the methods of participatory filmmaking. However, the discussions I engaged in with my co-workers and the participants of the film workshop I conducted dealt with the process of filmmaking much more than with the role of natural resources. The conception and implementation of the film can thus be considered as an analytical process that generates knowledge about the methods of participatory filmmaking itself. While this methodological knowledge is only implicitly represented in the film,<sup>8</sup> it is my intention to broaden the notion of filmmaking-as-research so as to encompass methodical issues. The filmmaking process – from the planning to the distribution and reception – was certainly the most important method of enquiry contributing to this work.

In contrast to conventional ethnography, which is ideally based on long-term fieldwork and in-depth relationships, my research is characterised by a relatively short fieldwork period. Due to financial limitations imposed by The Future

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<sup>8</sup> More generally, written anthropological text tends to be more explicit and explanatory than films (Crawford 1992: 70). Some scholars therefore argue the necessity of accompanying ethnographic films with a written contextualisation (Heider 1976).

Okavango project (TFO), the production of *Liparu Lyetu* and the accompanying research had to be accomplished within only ten weeks, between March 30<sup>th</sup> and June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011. In addition to the very tight production schedule, this brief period of time made the forming of in-depth relationships and a thorough knowledge of the participants impossible. Furthermore, as I did not have the opportunity to screen the finished film widely in Namibia, the circulation and reception of the film can only be considered in a cursory way. My research is focused on the actual production, during which I gained access to the participants through my working relationships with them. However, the research is also informed by my repeated visits to the Kavango Region and my ongoing relationships with local people – most importantly with the two co-workers who will be introduced later in the dissertation. By basing this work not only on a single film, but also including information from my previous experiences of participatory filmmaking, I seek to contextualise and broaden the insights gained during the production of *Liparu Lyetu*. The common institutional and methodological underpinnings of these films make their juxtaposition meaningful. The short timeframe and other restrictions imposed by the applied nature of the project were, nevertheless, extremely limiting, and will be discussed throughout the text.

While the main focus of this dissertation is the film *Liparu Lyetu*, all four films mentioned above represent an important contribution to the data on which this work is based. Additionally, some 150 hours of film footage that were not used in the finished films were reviewed during the editing process: “In a manner analogous to the sifting through of field notes, the logging and organization of rushes<sup>9</sup> can yield new insights simply through intensive engagement with the material” (Henley 2000: 221). Unedited footage is first and foremost a document of a film’s production that contains abundant contextual information. Especially interesting are the directions and discussions between the different persons involved in the production, both behind and in front of the camera, which were never intended to end up in the film. Viewing and evaluating this material, both during editing and after the production was complete, was therefore an important

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<sup>9</sup> This term encompasses unedited film footage.

aspect of the analytical process leading to this dissertation. The entire film material is seen as part of its body of data.

In addition to filmmaking, I applied a number of other methods, such as participant observation, informal conversations, and open and semi-structured interviews. The field diary I kept throughout my film productions serves as an important source of data. Furthermore, after the completion of the film I conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants and with one of my Namibian co-workers. These in-depth interviews, which are mostly about the participants' perception of the film and the process of its making, are supplemented by a number of conversations with TFO colleagues and "experts" on development and environmental issues that I conducted in Germany and at various locations in Namibia. In addition, I recorded and transcribed two public meetings with villagers of the Mashare Area which took place during the film's production, as well as a number of interviews and conversations with local resource-users and decision-makers. Finally, I had the chance to present and discuss my work intensively with anthropologists and filmmakers on two occasions: the first at the *bremer institut für kulturforschung* (bik) workshop at the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Studies at the University of Bremen; the second during a Visual Anthropology Workshop organised by the *Centro Incontri Umani* in Ascona. The group discussions were recorded and transcribed and serve as source material for the assessment of the general reception and interpretation of the films. This body of self-generated data was complemented with a limited amount of quantitative data gathered by TFO colleagues and Namibian institutions (NPC 2004, 2008, 2012). A review of the Namibian and international press (mostly the online editions), as well as the academic literature, was another important source of information.

Three of the four films discussed here were aimed at local audiences and produced predominantly with speakers of the local languages Rukwangali and Rushambyu,<sup>10</sup> neither of which I speak sufficiently well to allow me to interact

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<sup>10</sup> These two *Bantu* languages are very similar and mutually understandable.



directly at the level that I would ideally prefer.<sup>11</sup> While the acquisition of the local language is usually perceived as an important aspect of anthropological fieldwork, many anthropologists and filmmakers have relied on local translators and research assistants. I likewise relied on interpreters throughout my work in Namibia, not only during the production of the films but also in the contextualising research. Two local research assistants and native Rukwangali speakers, Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba, did the necessary translations and interpretations into English. Not only did they interpret my informal conversations and interviews with non-English speakers throughout the research and filming, but they also became an indispensable aid during post-production: interpreting the dialogues simultaneously during editing, making transcriptions in both the original languages and in English, and providing the voiceover narrations that were recorded and later edited into the films. Moreover, Raphael Sinkumba also translated and transcribed the interviews and recordings of community meetings and conversations that I conducted as part of my contextualising research. Their translations, were not merely representations of the direct linguistic meanings of what was said, but deeper interpretations that informed the basis of my cultural understanding. Mukuya and Sinkumba thus contributed enormously to my work. The diverse roles they played, and their increasing involvement in the filmmaking, are a recurring theme throughout this dissertation.

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<sup>11</sup> The production of *Bridging the Gap* in South Africa was implemented largely in English. Afrikaans parts were translated by Vilho Snake Mtuleni, who assisted during the production (Chapter 4.3). Michael Pröpper, co-director of the first film produced in Namibia, *Wiza Wetu*, has some basic command of Rukwangali, but more complex conversations had to be interpreted.

### 3. Participation, Collaboration and Applied Visual Anthropology

With little regard for differing levels of control, the term collaboration has long served as a politically acceptable catch-all description of most joint efforts. In documentary [filmmaking] the term is tossed around to mean anything from the subject<sup>12</sup> as informant to the sharing of differing skills to the subject introducing the crew into a community to the subject as co-producer. (Elder 1995: 94)

In this chapter I discuss the concepts of participation and collaboration as used in anthropology and filmmaking in order to establish a conceptual framework. The main part of the chapter deals with the work of four filmmakers who shaped the field of ethnographic filmmaking with their participatory approaches: Robert Flaherty, Jean Rouch, and Judith and David MacDougall. I also introduce the closely related fields of indigenous media and PV, which together delineate the context of my own work. Most of my examples are taken from visual anthropology, and therefore linked to general questions of methodology and representation within the discipline. However, since its inception visual anthropology has been engaged in a continual and ongoing exchange with similar practices from outside academia (Pink 2009a). As my work was implemented in an applied context, I provide an overview of the field of “applied visual anthropology” (Pink 2004a). The chapter concludes with a summary of the most significant criteria for participation emerging from a review of the literature covering these filmmakers and approaches.

#### 3.1. Participation and Collaboration in Ethnographic Filmmaking

Quarrels, jokes, family scenes, events usually trivial, sometimes dramatic but always significant, form the atmosphere of my daily life, as well as of theirs. It must be remembered that the natives saw me constantly every day, they ceased to be interested or alarmed, or made self-conscious by my presence, and I ceased to be a disturbing element in the tribal life which I was to study, altering it

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<sup>12</sup> The term “subject” is frequently used in the anthropological literature on film (and research). It resonates with the debate on the objectification of subjects through anthropological research (see Fabian 1983). Within this dissertation, I prefer the less ambivalent term *protagonist* to encompass the “actors” of a documentary film.

by my very approach, as always happens with a newcomer to every savage community. In fact, as they knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as a part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco. (Malinowski 1961: 7-8)

Participant observation has been anthropology's central and perhaps even defining method since Bronisław Malinowski's forced stay on the Trobriand Islands during the First World War. The researcher takes part in the everyday lives of his or her "informants" – often through extended periods of fieldwork and in-depth relationships (see for example Bernard 2000: 317ff). Participation in this sense is also widely perceived as an important asset of ethnographic filmmaking, intended to represent the fieldwork experience (MacDougall 2003a; Henley 2004; see also Grimshaw 2001). The inclusion of protagonists in the making of ethnographic films also has a long tradition and one can certainly speak of such participatory approaches as distinctive characteristics of the genre; perhaps even as defining characteristics (Durning 2009: 197). However, the terms *participation* and *collaboration* are used interchangeably throughout the literature. Their precise meaning often remains obscure. In this chapter, I outline the various practices and underlying concepts that have been employed throughout the history of ethnographic filmmaking by introducing some of the genre's key figures, and link them to contemporary practices.

As a preliminary basis for this chapter, I begin with Jay Ruby's (1991, 1995, 2000) discussion of shared authority and authorship in ethnographic filmmaking. However, in a typical instance of the aforementioned terminological ambiguity, Ruby does not include the term *participation* in his analysis. Instead, he differentiates between *cooperation* – defined as asking for, and receiving, the protagonists' advice and consent – and the more genuinely participatory *collaboration* (1991: 55). Whereas Ruby considers the active cooperation of protagonists in the making of a film as increasing their power, he doubts their capacity to evaluate potential consequences. Questioning the notion of *informed consent*, he argues that the ethical and intellectual responsibility for a film always lies with the anthropologist: "Advice, consent and cooperation are necessary, but not sufficient when dealing with the potential for exploitation" (1991: 55). I share

Ruby's concern about the possibility of exploitation, and support his call for filmmakers to acknowledge the responsibility this places upon them. However, in denying protagonists the competence to judge the implications of their participation, and thus to shape its conditions accordingly, Ruby elevates the power of anthropologists and filmmakers in a dubious way. While filmmakers might be able to judge the effects of a film in their own cultural context better than non-professionals (though even this is debatable), if films are screened locally – a practice that often comprises a central aspect of participatory projects – the participants, as cultural and social insiders, are arguably in a much better position to judge the import and consequences of the work than any outside "expert". Moreover, Ruby's perspective is somewhat outdated, as many indigenous and minority groups around the globe now control the images made about them rigidly. Today, informed consent is an imperative in all anthropological research (AAA 2009: 3) and has become common practice in anthropological filmmaking.

Following Ruby, *cooperation* becomes *collaboration* when filmmakers and protagonists determine the content and shape of the film together. However, in order to be truly collaborative, according to Ruby's definition, the parties involved must be "equal in their competencies or have achieved an equitable division of labor. Involvement in the decision-making process must occur at all significant junctures" (1991: 56). Moreover, he insists that true collaborators have "some sort of technical, intellectual, and cultural parity" (1991: 57). Ruby negates the possibility of collaborative filmmaking in his own strict sense, however, arguing that local actors would not work with an outsider if they had all the resources and competencies necessary to make their own films. This negative and narrow view of intercultural encounters is challenged by a number of filmmakers and scholars who have illustrated how collaborative filmmaking (outside Ruby's strict framework) can be a worthwhile activity for both sides (Elder 1995; Flores 2009). Ruby's definition is useful nevertheless as an analytical device, and as a reminder of the various levels and stages of a film production that must be assessed in order to evaluate collaborative, or participatory, approaches to filmmaking:

Is the collaboration to be found at all stages of the production? Have the filmmakers trained the subjects in technical and artistic production skills or are the subjects merely "subject area specialists" who gauge the accuracy of the information and pass upon the political and moral correctness of the finished work? Who had the idea for the film in the first place? Who raised and controls the funds? Who owns the equipment? Who is professionally concerned with the completion of the film? Who organizes and controls the distribution? (Ruby 1995: 80f)

### **3.1.1. Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*: An Early Example of Participation**

It has always been most important for me to see my rushes – it is the only way I can make a film. But another reason for developing the film in the north was to project it to the Eskimos so that they would accept and understand what I was doing and work together with me as partners. (Robert Flaherty cited in Ruby 2000: 88)

Robert J. Flaherty's (1922) *Nanook of the North*, shot in 1920 and 1921, is commonly discussed as one of the earliest examples of ethnographic filmmaking, even though Flaherty was not an anthropologist by training and the film was neither produced nor received within an anthropological context at the time of its production. Despite these circumstances, *Nanook* went on to become one of the emblematic films of the genre due to the particular way in which Flaherty approached and represented his protagonists. The film is structured as a number of self-contained, chapter-like sequences depicting the daily activities of an Inuit called Nanook and his family. They are shown hunting, fishing, constructing an Igloo, travelling with their dog-sledge, and performing other daily activities. *Nanook* is essentially about the Inuits' struggle against their harsh natural environment in the Arctic North. Comparing Flaherty's filmmaking with participant observation as proposed by Malinowski, Anna Grimshaw emphasises that the former wanted to be "exposed to his subjects as completely as possible" (2001: 50). It was an "intense and long-term engagement with the people and the landscape in which they lived" that made his filmmaking "akin to ethnographic fieldwork" (Grimshaw 2001: 48). Prior to the shooting of *Nanook*, which took place over a period of twelve months, Flaherty had spent several years travelling in the north of Canada. As an explorer and mining prospector he had lived with

Inuit communities and developed great admiration for the people living in this environment.

A “humanist impulse”, as Grimshaw (2001) calls it, motivated him to make a film, and served as the foundation of his entire project. Guided by the idea of expressing his admiration for the Inuit, Flaherty was not interested in showing his protagonists’ realities as experienced in the early 1920s, but rather in portraying an elevated and romantic version of their lives before Western contact. The film thus contains a lot of staging and re-enactment, for example of “traditional” subsistence activities. While this approach was later criticised as a distortion of reality and as “salvage anthropology”, it still required the active and creative involvement of its protagonists. Jay Ruby (2000: 88-91) cites extensive passages from Flaherty’s records in order to demonstrate how these re-enactments were conceived in cooperation with his protagonists, rather than simply being directed by him. Flaherty’s participatory approach was not characterised by the mutual development of re-enacted sequences alone, however. Ruby describes in some detail how “Flaherty planned from the very beginning to have the Inuit participate in the making of the film” (2000: 87). From early on in his career as a filmmaker Flaherty asked his protagonists for their advice regarding the filmmaking. He organised screenings of rushes and of previous films documenting Inuit activities, in order to motivate his protagonists and explain his work to them. These feedback screenings inspired them to propose certain scenes that they wanted to be included in the film. Flaherty also trained some Inuit to work for him as technicians.

Paul Henley (2009: 253f) downplays Flaherty’s participatory intentions as being merely pragmatic, on the grounds that he did not sustain extended relationships with his protagonists and never went back to show them his finished films. This view is contradicted by both Ruby (2000) and Paul Stoller, who writes that “with Flaherty filmmaking becomes a joint enterprise, narrowing the gulf between filmmakers and the people they film” (Stoller 1992: 100). His impact on participatory approaches in ethnographic filmmaking must not be underestimated:

Flaherty began a tradition of participatory filmmaking that continues today. ... Every time filmmakers show their rushes to the subjects of their films and ask for their comments and approval, every time filmmakers ask people to self-consciously portray themselves and the events of their lives in front of the camera, every time filmmakers try to mesh their interpretations with those of their subjects—the filmmakers are continuing to build “big aggie [film] igloos” for their audience. (Ruby 2000: 91)

While their influence on the filmmaking process was limited, the protagonists contributed to the devising and implementation of the film in various ways. One significant methodological decision is indicated by Flaherty’s introduction of re-enacted sequences. Even though the film was motivated by somewhat romantic conceptions of Inuit culture, my reading of it suggests that it constituted a shift in agency. The protagonists’ active participation is both a prerequisite and an outcome of conceiving and enacting these fictional sequences. The method is therefore fundamental to the way Nanook and his family are represented (and perceived) as proud and dignified personalities.

### **3.1.2. Jean Rouch: From Shared Anthropology to Ethnofiction**

Tomorrow will be the time of completely portable colour video, video editing, and instant replay (“instant feedback”). Which is to say, the time of the joint dream of Vertov and Flaherty, of a mechanical ciné-eye-ear and of a camera that can so totally participate that it will automatically pass into the hands of those who, until now, have always been in front of the lens. At that point anthropologists will no longer control the monopoly on observation; their culture and they themselves will be observed and recorded. And it is in that way that ethnographic film will help us “share” anthropology. (Rouch 2003: 46)

French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch started his career in the second half of the 1940s in colonial West Africa. While most of his colleagues were working within a strictly positivist framework, Rouch quickly came to believe that he captured a reality that was provoked by his presence with the camera. Conceiving of his filmmaking as a form of storytelling, he challenged a rigid differentiation between fiction and documentary throughout his career. He drew heavily on the work of Robert Flaherty, calling him one of his “totemic

ancestors”.<sup>13</sup> He developed Flaherty’s ideas further, and included his protagonists in the process of filmmaking more substantially (Henley 2009: 253). His concepts of *shared anthropology* and *ethnofictional filmmaking*<sup>14</sup> both outlined below, are extremely important for the discussion of participatory filmmaking.

In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Rouch regarded his research and filmmaking as processes of mutual exchange. Based on a reciprocal relationship with his protagonists he developed his principle of *shared anthropology*, which he considered could be achieved on different levels (Henley 2009: 310ff): Firstly, like Robert Flaherty, Rouch regularly screened his rushes and rough cuts to his protagonists during the production of a film. In the case of ongoing projects, these screenings also had practical value, as they gave Rouch the opportunity to discuss the ethnographic content of the footage and the filming yet to come with his protagonists. More importantly, Rouch went back to the communities that had participated in the filmmaking in order to show them his finished products. In the long-lasting relationships he developed with the participants of his projects, the screenings served Rouch as a “gift given in exchange for the trust that the subjects had shown in allowing him to film in the first place” as well as “a catalyst for the development of mutual understanding between observer and observed” (Henley 2009: 316; see also 254). Nevertheless Rouch himself considered his feedback screenings as a relatively passive form of shared anthropology. A higher level could only be reached in the event that members of the audience of these screenings asked him to do another film project with them. If the feedback screenings thus initiated new films, Rouch considered the participants of these subsequent films as more active “stakeholders” of the project than mere protagonists (Henley 2009: 318). A third stage of shared anthropology could only be realised through the interaction between filmmaker and protagonists during the shooting of a film:

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<sup>13</sup> His second such “totemic ancestor” was the Russian documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov, from whom he borrowed the term *Kino-Pravda* (*cinema-vérité*) (Henley 2009: 244ff).

<sup>14</sup> While Rouch himself called this approach “ciné-fiction” or “science fiction”, it later became referred to as ethnofiction. The origin of the term is however unclear (Henley 2009: 74f see also 441).



So the filmmaker stages this reality like a director, improvising his shots, his movements or his shooting time, a subjective choice whose only key is his personal inspiration. And, no doubt, a masterpiece is achieved when this inspiration of the observer is in unison with the collective inspiration of what he is observing. But this is so rare, it demands such a connivance, that I can only compare it to those exceptional moments of a jam session between Duke Ellington's piano and Louis Armstrong's trumpet. (Rouch 2003: 185f)

Rouch's shared anthropology was certainly most keen and innovative in his early ethnofiction filmmaking. Based on his guiding principles of intuition, play, chance and risk, these films combined a "laboriously researched and carefully analyzed ethnography" with a fictional framework (Stoller 1992: 143). During his anthropological fieldwork on labour migration in West Africa, Rouch found it "impossible to show the full range of the migrants' experience within the limitations of a conventional documentary", and therefore decided to combine documentary and fictional elements (Henley 2009: 73). Since this new approach also brought with it an intensified involvement on the part of the films' protagonists, I decided to take a closer look at the two feature-length films that were its foundation: *Jaguar*, filmed in 1954-1955, and *Moi, un Noir*, filmed in 1957.<sup>15</sup>

*Jaguar* (Rouch 1967) depicts the annual migration of young men from the colony of Niger to the economically prosperous cities of the Gold Coast, as present-day Ghana was called during the time of filming. In order to produce the film, Rouch engaged as his protagonists three Nigeriens he knew from his previous research and film projects: Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahim and Illo Gaoude. *Jaguar* is a lighthearted and humorous road movie that follows the three young men on their journey from their hometown of Ayourou to look for work in Ghana. After encountering various adventures and obstacles the three men reach Gold Coast and manage to find work in Kumasi and Accra. After a few months they return home to their village with money and gifts as "heroes of a modern world", as Rouch calls them in the film's voiceover narration (Rouch 1967: 1:18:38). Before

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<sup>15</sup> Rouch's earlier film *Les Maîtres Fous* (1954) is a third film that deals with aspects of migration, but is constructed in a rather conventional documentary realist style.

resuming their village lives, Damouré, Lam and Illo share their newly acquired wealth, along with the stories of their adventures, with their friends and kin. The men's journey can be interpreted as both a rite of passage and a satire on ethnography. The film is driven by the wit and humour of its protagonists and is essentially a celebration of human agency (Grimshaw 2001).

*Moi un Noir*, on the other hand, is a rather disenchanting portrayal of the lives of migrants and their struggle for work and dignity in the Ivorian port city of Abidjan. The film follows a group of Nigerian migrants, centred around the two main protagonists Oumarou Ganda and Petit Touré, who named the characters they played in the film after the popular movie actors Edward G. Robinson and Eddie Constantine. *Moi un Noir* shows aspects of their everyday lives: searching for work, doing their jobs, hanging out in bars, and going to the beach, as well as looking for mutual support in a migrants' association. The film also contains two elaborate sequences representing the protagonists' dreams and fantasies: Robinson is first portrayed as a victorious boxing champion, and again later in a happy relationship with a female character, Dorothy Lamour. Both situations are revealed as illusions, however, in sharp contrast with the harsh filmic reality these characters actually live in. *Moi un Noir* has a pessimistic outlook: the sense of the protagonists' poverty is overwhelming, and the individuals never seem to be able to overcome the structural limitations of their predicament. The city is portrayed as a cosmopolitan and multicultural space, but offers no possibility of escape in the form of upward mobility. Despite the hardships and humiliations they experience, the protagonists are portrayed as strong personalities making sense of their difficult situation.

Rouch produced his ethnofictions largely as documentaries, "without a script and with minimal direction, relying primarily on the protagonists to determine the way in which the action of the film would develop" (Henley 2009: 259; see also Sjöberg 2008: 236). Anne Mette Jørgensen gives a vivid account of the way in which Rouch and his protagonists initiated and conceived their later ethnofictions in close cooperation:

First, everybody brainstormed, Rouch being relatively quiet and expectant, and Lam often the originator of the main theme of the film. From one of the upcoming ideas they then improvized [sic] and collectively created a storyline without ever writing a script, or even a single line of speech. They had an idea about elements and directions the film would take, but they never knew the ending. (Jørgensen 2007: 63)

While the above description refers to Rouch's later ethnofictions, which were based on long-lasting relationships, and is therefore not fully representative of the two films described herein, it gives an impression of how initiative and decision-making power were transferred to the protagonists. At the same time, Jørgensen identifies a division of labour, in which the protagonists were responsible for the story and the "kind of knowledge" they considered relevant to the film, while Rouch was in charge of the filming itself (2007: 65ff). After agreeing with the protagonists upon what would happen in a particular scene, Rouch shot it without direction or interruption. They normally filmed the sequences in the chronological order of the storyline, and tried to film only one take and angle per shot. This documentary style of filming allowed the "presence of some elements of risk and chance," which Rouch found so important for calling forth an "inspired performance" on the part of himself and his protagonists (Henley 2009: 254; see also Rouch 2003: 186).

Both Jørgensen (2007) and Loizos (1993) highlight the importance of improvisation and acting in Rouch's work. This is further elaborated by Johannes Sjöberg (2008, 2009) on the basis of his own ethnofiction filmmaking. Sjöberg's point of departure is Loizos' notion of "projective improvisation" highlighting the method by which something that is otherwise implicit may be made explicit in the filmmaking process:

Once you allow film subjects some freedom to improvise what they say, or do, you get the possibility that they will reveal values and feelings which they might otherwise not directly express, not because of repression or inhibition necessarily, but sometimes because they are "taken-for-granted". (Loizos cited in Sjöberg 2009: 2)

This implies that ethnofiction films are based on the protagonists' actual experiences, projected through improvised acting. Johannes Sjöberg differentiates between the *descriptive* and *expressive* functions of improvised acting (Sjöberg 2009: 6ff). *Descriptive* improvisations serve to illustrate or demonstrate certain activities or phenomena. This method is especially helpful if the subject is difficult to represent through other filmic approaches, as in the case of illegal or socially unacceptable activities (see also Taylor 1998: 6). Descriptive improvisations are not merely applied out of necessity, however: not, as Sjöberg puts it, "because there is *no other way to tell it* ... [but because] ethnofiction could be *a better way to tell it* from an ethnographic point of view" (Sjöberg 2009: 8; emphasis in the original). *Expressive* improvisations, on the other hand, refer to the possibility of revealing the protagonists' feelings, dreams and aspirations. The anonymity provided by their fictive characters allows the protagonists to disclose emotions, secrets or other intimate issues that may be difficult to express otherwise. The significance of such expressive aspects within anthropology is alluded to by David MacDougall, who reminds us that the "values of a society lie as much in its dreams as in the reality it has built" (MacDougall 2003a: 127). Sjöberg highlights that the process of filmmaking itself generates new knowledge, much as in conventional ethnographic filmmaking:

Unlike modern drama-documentaries where most of the research is conducted before the shooting and developed into a script, the research in Rouch's ethnofiction continued during the shooting as the protagonists projected their knowledge through the improvisations. The research relied heavily on the imagination of the protagonists and the improvised situations that occurred between the actors and their environment at the moment of shooting. The projective improvisation thus stands at the very centre of the research process in ethnofiction since the protagonist are not merely re-enacting events, but actually expressing partly subconscious knowledge of ethnographic value through their improvisations. (Sjöberg 2009: 7)

Sjöberg (2008: 238ff ) contends that the protagonists may interpret their acting quite differently. During his own filmmaking, which resulted in the film *Transfiction* (2007), Sjöberg realised that one of his protagonists made almost no distinction between her own identity and the role she was playing, so delivering a

“virtual performance”, as Bill Nichols calls the style of self-representation common in documentary filmmaking:

In this mode social actors, people, play themselves. They act as they normally would, and do so in a manner that conveys many of the expressive qualities we have to come to associate with a conventional performance. Though unrehearsed and unscripted, their virtual performance has expressive resonance and emotional power. It may correspond to how they normally conduct themselves in everyday life, but it also corresponds to the conventions of realist acting. (Nichols 1993: 224)

Sjöberg’s other protagonist played a much more fictive character, who she referred to as a completely distinct person. According to Sjöberg, she chose to play an idealised version of herself in order to both distance and protect herself from the negative feelings connected with her past. Quoting Rouch, Sjöberg (2008: 238f) terms her performance style “ethnofictional” acting:

The extraordinary possibility of playing a role that is oneself, but that one can disavow because it is only an *image* of oneself. One can say: “Yes, but it’s not me.” (Rouch cited in Blue 1967: 85; emphasis in the original)<sup>16</sup>

Nichols’ concept of virtual performance serves as a reminder of the fact that a degree of acting occurs in all documentary filmmaking.<sup>17</sup> Ethnofictions make these performances their central element: the fictional framework gives the protagonists the opportunity to choose a role and creatively develop it. The different ways in which the protagonists interpret their roles, however, are not only a matter of personal choice or creative freedom, as in the example of Sjöberg’s *Transfiction*. They may also be determined by the overall approach or theme of the specific project, as exemplified by Jean Rouch’s films discussed above. While in *Jaguar* the protagonists enacted a story the events of which they had never experienced themselves, in *Moi un Noir*, the main actor, Oumarou

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<sup>16</sup> Here Rouch actually refers to Marceline’s acting in the film *Chronique d’un Été*, (Rouch & Morin 1961), which is not an ethnofiction in the strict sense, but makes use of the same technique.

<sup>17</sup> See Lucien Taylor for a similar argument on performances and re-enactments (1998: 5f). See also Ervin Goffman (2010) for the performative aspects of human interaction more generally.

Ganda, played the character of a local dock worker: a life he had actually been living at the time he was hired by Rouch. Interestingly, Ganda and his friends even initiated the making of *Moi un Noir* on the grounds that *Jaguar* did not adequately reflect the immigrants' realities (Henley 2009: 83ff). After a screening of *Jaguar* they said to Rouch:

But this is a joke, one can clearly see that your hero never lived the life of an immigrant, that he does not know what it means. We here, we know what it is like. (Rouch 1999: translation by the author)

Even though the protagonists of *Moi un Noir* forcefully rejected the Rouchian game that was played in *Jaguar*, it would be wrong to conclude that the former is more "real" or "authentic" than the latter. I propose that both films draw on their protagonists' "real"-life experience as well as their imaginations and fantasies. These performances may also be inspired by various forms of media models, such as Hollywood movies in the case of Rouch's *Moi un Noir*, and *telenovelas* in the case of Sjöberg's *Transfiction* (Sjöberg 2009: 5). The uncertain relationship between the protagonists and the roles they are playing, as well as the diverse sources of influence on their acting, are highly important elements contributing to the way in which ethnofictions constitute their unique discursive space. Their ambiguous status, somewhere between fiction and reality, provides the protagonists with the freedom to experiment and play (in the Rouchian sense).

Following Loizos (1993) I would further argue that uncertainty is also of crucial importance in the reception of ethnofiction films. While both films discussed above were shot and edited largely within the conventions of realist documentary filmmaking, the viewers are informed from the start, through Jean Rouch's voiceover, that they are about to be "told a story" (1967: 00:20), or that the film was "improvised" by its protagonists, who "played their own roles" (Rouch 1959: 00:50-01:02). The resulting uncertainty is reinforced throughout the course of both films, especially through the voiceover narrations, but also by other filmic means. The way in which the viewer can never be sure about the relationship between the actors and their characters, or, more generally, between filmic and pre-filmic reality, challenges the conventions of both fiction and documentary. It

is partly this constant uncertainty that makes watching these films such an enjoyable experience.

If we ask the film [*Moi un Noir*] to deliver us an answer to the black-and-white question, are you a film of fact or a film of fiction, then we get back the answer that it is playing at being fiction in order to reveal facts: men who are actual labour migrants are playing at being labour migrants, creating characters taken from a street-life they have lived themselves. (Loizos 1993: 53)

Sound is of great importance for communicating the protagonists' presence in these two early ethnofiction films. Since at the time they were made synchronous sound was not yet available, both *Jaguar* and *Moi un Noir* were shot as silent films, but equipped with soundtracks in post-production. These consisted of a voiceover narration, itself improvised by the main protagonists, elaborately edited together with contextualising comments spoken by Rouch along with some added music and ambient sound (Henley 2009: 74; 90). The protagonists' narrations consist of several levels of reference that are constantly changing and therefore hard to distinguish, posing a continual challenge to the audience: in some instances the protagonists are repeating the on-screen conversations, thus creating an improvised synchronisation; at other moments, they are explaining what their characters are doing or what is happening, as in a descriptive commentary; on a third level, the protagonists are commenting on their own actions or feelings, creating a self-reflexive meta-level commentary on the story (see Rouch 2003: 62; 165). In both *Jaguar* and *Moi un Noir*, the soundtracks are a constant source of uncertainty regarding the films' status between fiction and documentary. The narrations have a strong influence on the overall atmosphere of the films, and more specifically on the way in which the protagonists are represented as self-reflexive personalities. Interestingly, this distinctive element of both *Jaguar* and *Moi un Noir* only came about due to the technical impossibility of recording synchronised sound at the time of filming. Once it became available, Rouch began producing his films using sync-sound technology, but his later ethnofictions never achieved the same level of complexity and reflexivity as the two early examples.

The reactions to Rouch's early ethnofiction films were overwhelmingly positive. Rouch himself found that *Jaguar* turned out to be a much more valuable account of labour migration than the reports and monographs he had written about the phenomenon, since it added a human dimension that the written accounts could never provide (Henley 2009: 81). As *Jaguar* was only released in 1969, *Moi un Noir* was the first ethnofiction to be shown publicly, and was received with great enthusiasm by critics and filmmakers of the *Nouvelle Vague* as well as by the wider public. The critics who admired Rouch's improvisational approach using non-professional actors highlighted the fact that it was the first feature film providing "general French audiences with the opportunity to hear Africans describing their life experiences in their own voices" (Henley 2009: 91). From a contemporary visual anthropological perspective, Paul Henley points out that *Jaguar* "acknowledges that rural Africans were already tied up into a much wider world, both politically and economically" and that the film "presents the migrants not as passive victims of this process but rather as active participants" (Henley 2009: 78). More importantly, Henley asserts that *Jaguar* succeeded in "representing its principal subjects not as exotic curiosities, as in previous genres of ethnographic film ... but rather as human beings with idiosyncratic characters and attitudes and ... their own dreams and fantasies (Henley 2009: 79). Anthropologists refer to the self-reflexive, multi-vocal and fictional representational strategies of ethnofiction filmmaking when arguing that Rouch had anticipated the literary turn in anthropology by almost thirty years (Stoller 1992: 199ff).

Despite these positive reactions, it could be argued that neither Rouch's protagonists nor the communities he studied benefited much from the filmmaking, apart from having "their way of living valorised in some sense through the making of a film" (Henley 2009: 321). This is not true in the case of several of Rouch's associates, however, with whom he developed long-lasting and intense relationships. Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahim Dia, Illo Gaudel and Tallou Mouzourane, amongst others, participated in many of Rouch's projects as protagonists or as translators, research assistants, and sound-recordists (Henley 2009: 322ff). Rouch paid them as his assistants, shared the income from their films with them and gave them the opportunity to travel. Perhaps even more



importantly, he trained some of them or arranged for them to train to become filmmakers themselves. Nevertheless, even for the members of the small group of long-term companions with whom Rouch “collaborated”, their relationship with him was far from equal:

... in the last analysis it was he who initiated the films, it was he who shaped them in the edit suite (...), and it was he who distributed them afterward, usually travelling round the world with them to modulate their impact on the eventual audiences. As far as authorship was concerned, then, what this sharing of anthropology came down to was a process whereby Rouch engaged his subjects directly and profoundly in the conceptualization and shooting of his films, but in the end, the films that eventually emerged from the edit suite bore his unmistakable signature, overriding all others. (Henley 2009: 330)

Rouch’s early ethnofictions described above, as well as the later *Chronique d’un Été* (Rouch & Morin 1961), are groundbreaking in their reflexive approach and the way the protagonists are included in the filmmaking process. At the same time, many of Rouch’s later ethnographic films are rather distanced and descriptive, and can even be seen as regressive (see also Henley 2009: 227). Despite his futuristic visions of a camera that would pass “into the hands of those who, until now, have always been in front of the lens” (Rouch 2003: 46), Jean Rouch always retained a high level of control over his filmmaking and never actually “handed the camera over” to his protagonists. He reinforced this position through his rejection of video technology, with its democratising effects, as expressed in an interview I conducted with him in 2001 (Gruber 2006).<sup>18</sup>

Ethnofictions played a central role in Rouch’s ideas of shared anthropology. Creating a distinctive space in which the protagonists were able to improvise and play – drawing on their experiences, imaginations, dreams and fantasies, as well as all sorts of models from the media, traditional storytelling, and so on – seems to have been crucial in inscribing their characters so powerfully into these films (see MacDougall 1994). The fictional framework changes the relationship

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<sup>18</sup> Various scholars and filmmakers went so far as to criticise Rouch’s practices as paternalistic, apolitical, colonialist and even racist. For a comprehensive overview of the critique see Henley (2009: 331ff).

between filmmaker and protagonists. They become players of the same (Rouchian) game, rather than being bound into the more rigid hierarchical relationship between observer and observed (Foucault 1995) that, it could be argued, is characteristic of more conventional documentary filmmaking. Ethnofictional filmmaking therefore constitutes a shift in power that extends beyond mutual decision-making alone. I consider fictionalisation as one of Rouch's most significant contributions to participatory approaches to filmmaking today.

### **3.1.3. The Participatory Cinema of David and Judith MacDougall**

Beyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a PARTICIPATORY CINEMA, bearing witness to the "event" of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal. Here the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture. (MacDougall 2003a: 125; emphasis in the original)

The opening sequence of *A Wife amongst Wives* by Judith and David MacDougall (1981) is certainly among the most remarkable in ethnographic film.<sup>19</sup> After the title sequence the film starts with a sequence of black and white photographs of the MacDougalls and their research participants in what can be recognised as typical fieldwork and filming situations. These are intercut with colour film clips: Long shots of a homestead in the savannah landscape and of people walking in the distance. The soundtrack of this sub-sequence is composed of chirping birds and distant voices. After approximately one minute, an orange notebook on a black background is shown with the superimposed white titles: "TURKANA DISTRICT - NORTHWESTERN KENYA -1973-74" (MacDougall & MacDougall 1981: 0:53). This is followed by images of hand-written field notes and sketches (obviously from the field diary), intercut with black and white photographs and colour film shots. At the same time, the filmmakers start reading extracts from their field diary, resulting in a voice-over comment about the progress of their research and filmmaking. From Judith MacDougall we learn that the filmmakers were "interested in how the Turkana

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<sup>19</sup> The film is the second part of the *Turkana Conversations* trilogy, shot in Kenya in 1973 and 1974.

view marriage” (MacDougall & MacDougall 1981: 02:07-02:10). Two of the film’s main protagonists are then introduced, first through black and white photographs, and then on colour film with synchronous sound. The two women sitting in their homesteads with their children are asked what they would make a film about. While the first one answers that she does not know anything about filmmaking and therefore does not know how she would go about it, the other woman answers that she would film the filmmakers’ belongings, such as clothes and boxes, as well as their house and car. Then she goes on: “Film all those things for us or give us the camera and we’ll do it ourselves” (MacDougall & MacDougall 1981: 03:36-03:40). The following shot depicts the same woman inside a house, filming the interiors with a Super 8 camera, and then a series of images from her camera: book shelves, children’s drawings, and, finally, David MacDougall behind his camera. Shot and counter-shot: the Other, filming the filmmaker, filming the Other.

These intriguing images fuel expectations of a film that makes the protagonists’ interests and intentions a central element – and one in which they contribute to its practical making. These are not fulfilled, however. After its self-reflexive opening, the film moves on to the filmmakers’ interests: the role of women and marriage in Turkana society.<sup>20</sup> First, through a number of conversations with Turkana men and women discussing these subjects from different angles and then by focussing on the negotiations and festivities that form part of a particular wedding. While the filmmakers’ voice-over comments remain a structuring element of the film, they become invisible behind the camera. As the comments become more scarce and more explanatory than reflexive, the viewer gets increasingly drawn into the story.

The film’s opening is an interesting and effective way to disclose the fieldwork and filmmaking situation and make the viewers reflect upon the generation and representation of anthropological knowledge. The division between this

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<sup>20</sup> In an interview David MacDougall explained that he sees the beginning sequence of the film as rather emblematic of the filmmakers’ relationship with their protagonists (Grimshaw & Papastergiadis 1995: 36) and that the people around them were not very interested in their filmmaking (Grimshaw & Papastergiadis 1995: 40).

sequence and the rest of the film can be interpreted as exposing its position within the MacDougalls' quest to include their protagonists in the process of filmmaking. While the nature of their relationship with the protagonists of their films has concerned the MacDougalls throughout their filmmaking and writing (see for example MacDougall 1982, 1994, 2003a), in practice they have always maintained a certain distance. In order to explore this incongruity I will discuss the MacDougalls' concept of *participatory cinema* (2003a).

David and Judith MacDougall are amongst the most influential visual anthropologists working today. Since the early 1970s they have produced numerous films, many as co-directors, with David MacDougall operating the camera and Judith MacDougall in charge of recording the sound, but also independently. In addition, David MacDougall has written extensively on the role of filmmaking within anthropology (see MacDougall & Taylor 1998; MacDougall 2006). Neither of them are anthropologists by education but both trained as filmmakers at the University of California's (UCLA) "Ethnographic Film Program" in Los Angeles during the 1960s. Inspired by Italian neo-realism, *cinéma vérité* and *direct cinema*,<sup>21</sup> amongst others, Colin Young, the director of the programme, together with his colleagues and students forged an approach called *observational cinema*. Enabled by hand-held cameras and synchronous sound recording technology, observational filmmaking was intended to replicate and represent the fieldwork encounter, giving the viewers space to draw their own conclusions (Young 2003: 101ff; see also Ravetz & Grimshaw 2009: 5f). The approach was described by one of the MacDougalls' co-students, David Hancock, as follows:

We shoot in long takes dealing with specific individuals rather than cultural patterns or analysis. We try to complete an action within a single shot, rather than fragmenting it. Our work is based on an open interaction between us as people (not just film-makers) and the people being filmed. Their perspectives and

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<sup>21</sup> In his article, Young uses the term *cinéma vérité* to encompass both this French movement and the US American *direct cinema* school alike – a tendency that can be found in much of the Anglophone literature. However, Young's writing is mainly concerned with the technological innovations that formed the common basis of what were otherwise extremely different approaches (Young 2003: 106).

concerns shape and structure the film rather than our emphasis on a particular topic or analysis of their culture. (cited in Young 2003: 108)

Observational films in this tradition had to be based on “an intimate, sympathetic relationship between the filmmaker and the subject” (Young 2003: 110). Inspired by films like Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s *Cronique d’un Été* (1961), students and teachers of the UCLA ethnographic film programme were especially concerned with the relationship between filmmakers, protagonists and the audience, as David MacDougall recalls:

The audience and the film subjects had to be drawn more fully into the filming process as confidants and participants. We should be more involved in a common quest for knowledge ... At the same time, we understood that the way in which one expressed something was part of its meaning, and that the anthropologist-filmmaker had an interpretative role to play. ... It was up to the viewer to look at films more critically, to see the filmmaker in them, and to learn how to learn from them. (2001a: 87)

As a result of these interests, David MacDougall was already looking “beyond observational cinema” when his former teacher Colin Young was still coming to terms with the observational approach – both documented in articles published in Paul Hocking’s (2003) seminal “Principles of Visual Anthropology” in 1975. Arguing with a very literal notion of observation, MacDougall presented observational filmmaking as limiting: by confining himself “to that which occurs naturally and spontaneously in front of the camera”, the filmmaker had to rely on “the unprovoked ways in which his subjects manifest the patterns of their lives during the moments he is filming them. He is denied access to anything they know but take for granted, anything latent in their culture which events do not bring to the surface” (2003a: 124). Evoking images of detached observation, MacDougall professed strong ethical concerns with such an approach to filmmaking:

By asking nothing of his subjects beyond permission to film them, the filmmaker adopts an inherently secretive position. He has no need for further explanation, no need to communicate with his subjects on the basis of the thinking that organizes his work. ... In his refusal to give his subjects access to the film, the filmmaker refuses them access to himself, for this is clearly his most important

activity when he is among them. In denying a part of his own humanity, he denies a part of theirs. (2003a: 124)

In order to counter the perceived problems of such an observational approach, MacDougall advocated the development of a *participatory cinema*, based on different forms of mutual interaction between the filmmaker, his or her protagonists and, consequently, the audience:

By entering actively into the world of his subjects, he can provoke a greater flow of information about them. By giving them access to the film, he makes possible the corrections, additions, and illuminations that only their response to the material can elicit. Through such an exchange a film can begin to reflect the ways in which the subjects perceive the world. (MacDougall 2003a: 125)

MacDougall discusses three kinds of participation here: firstly the filmmakers' "active entering" into the lives of their protagonists, much as in participant observation, and secondly the protagonists' "access" to the film. By the latter, MacDougall means the different ways in which the protagonists influence the film during and after the shooting. Implicit in his argument is a third aspect of participation, namely the audience's participation (MacDougall 2003a: 126; see also David MacDougall in Grimshaw & Papastergiadis 1995: 40). During a recent conversation about his work, David MacDougall explained to me in more detail: "the audience participates in the creation of meaning through their own interpretations. Because films ... create big gaps which are filled with our imagination. ... I think good films invite the viewer to participate in this process" (personal communication 30.5.2014). I would argue that while such an approach to anthropological filmmaking was rather new at the time, today many ethnographic filmmakers perceive their work more or less within these parameters.

However, David MacDougall advocated a deeper and more reciprocal relationship between filmmakers and protagonists in 1975. Drawing on the work of Flaherty and Rouch, he proposes "a process of collaboration – the filmmaker combining the skills and sensibilities of his subjects with his own" requiring that both sides are "moved by at least some common sense of urgency" (2003a:

126). As a kind of ideal, MacDougall suggested an equal relationship between the filmmaker and his or her protagonists:

A further step will be films in which participation occurs in the very conception and recognizes common goals. That possibly remains all but unexplored – a filmmaker putting himself at the disposal of his subjects and, with them inventing the film. (2003a: 128)

A few years after their first experiments in *participatory cinema* with the *Turkana Trilogy*, Judith and David MacDougall explored the possibilities of such forms of participation as resident filmmakers amongst Aboriginal communities in the Aurukun area of Northern Queensland. The basic agreement with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, with whom they were affiliated at the time, was that they would only make films requested by the community. The Aborigines, who were involved in an ongoing struggle for land rights and self-determination, were aware of the political significance of film and appropriated the filmmaking accordingly (MacDougall 1994; see also Grimshaw 2001: 140ff). The MacDougall's activities thus took place in a highly politicised arena with which the filmmaking itself inevitably became entangled. While most of the resulting films were authored by the MacDougalls alone, some of them were made in collaboration – or “joint authorship” as MacDougall calls it – with community members (personal communication on 30.5.2014). I want to discuss two films that can be seen as serving the protagonists as postulated by David MacDougall in 1975.

The 87 minute-long film *Takeover* (1980b) documents the Aurukun Aboriginal Community's struggle against the Queensland Regional Government's plan to take over the management of their land, the Aurukun and Mornington Island Aboriginal Reserves. While the community members suspect the regional Government of attempting to forcibly gain control over their land and its natural resources, they manage to achieve public attention and initiate a political debate with the support of different individuals and organisations as well as the national media. *Takeover* is constructed almost exclusively from footage of different kinds of conversations: informal talks between community members and their supporters, public political meetings, involving speeches by different

representatives of both the community and the government, and some statements addressing the camera directly. The film, with its crisis structure and its emphasis on public speech, is reminiscent of the earlier direct cinema (for example Drew 1960). The presence of a large number of reporters and camerapeople in the film indicates that the situation was a highly mediated event. This is further emphasised by the use of commentary consisting of extracts from radio news broadcasts which establish the state of developments as they were perceived from the outside. This “official” perspective is juxtaposed with a deeply moving narration by Francis Yunkaporta, an Aurukun community leader, explaining the developments from an insider’s perspective.

Installing a community member in such an important position can be viewed as a strong marker of the film’s authenticity and its collaborative nature – something also indicated by the introductory titles at the beginning of the film: “[This film] was made at the request of the Aurukun Council by film-makers who had been at Aurukun for the previous 8 months” (MacDougall & MacDougall 1980b: 00:29). Despite these elements, David MacDougall did not perceive *Takeover* as particularly collaborative. The filmmakers’ main intention was to document the conflict in order to “create a body of evidence” that could be used by the community, for example in case of misrepresentation by the government (personal communication 30.5.2014).

The second film I want to discuss is the 53 minute-long film *Familiar Places* (MacDougall & MacDougall 1980a). Shot in 1977, the film follows an Australian anthropologist, Peter Sutton, and some members of an Aboriginal family, on a trip to their traditional clan land. The journey’s purpose, is the mapping of the family’s traditional land – which is also a central aspect of Sutton’s anthropological work. The film, consisting of observational material as well as interviews and informal conversations, follows the group to significant places. An old man, the only protagonist familiar with the area, explains to Sutton and the younger family members the different uses and meanings of each site they visit, mostly by recounting clan and family stories. The film is dominated by the anthropologist’s narrations, both on camera and as a voice-over comment, which explain the details of the film’s storyline as well as his anthropological



understandings of the significance of land and mapping. It becomes evident that mapping is an important means of claiming land rights, both within the Aboriginal society and towards outsiders. Consequently, the protagonists adopt the filmmaking for this end, the film becoming a part of the activities it documents, as David MacDougall remembers:

As we were filming we became aware that the perception which Aborigines had of the mapping, as recognition (or "*registration*") of their clan territories, extended to the film itself. There are many expressions of this in the film, as when Jack Spear formally addresses the camera and sound recorder; but simply by the act of participating in the film people are appropriating it for an Aboriginal purpose. (MacDougall 1994: 35)

These two examples illustrate different ways in which films can serve their protagonists or the communities they originate from. While *Takeover* can be seen as a form of evidence in an Aboriginal community's political struggle, *Familiar Places* was rather used by different individuals to gain recognition over land rights and possibly personal status. However, the MacDougalls, however, never granted their protagonists real co-authorship during this period. After some ten films made in cooperation with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies between 1975 and 1986, they shifted their attention away from Australia and this kind of collaboration (MacDougall & MacDougall 1991; MacDougall 1993; MacDougall 2001c). David MacDougall's current work is an exploration in observational filmmaking with an increased concern for the embodied and experiential aspects of filmic knowledge (see also MacDougall 1999, 2006). This "observational turn", as Anna Grimshaw (2002: 88) has termed it, implies a shift back to the classical anthropological notion of the filmmaker's participation in the lives of his or her protagonists. It is important at this point to relativise the opposition between observational and participatory filmmaking, along with aspects of the underlying critique of the observational approach. David MacDougall's (2003a) own early criticism was based on an almost literal definition of observational cinema, evoking the image of a detached and scientific gaze, a definition notably at odds with the MacDougalls' and their co-students' practice. In a discussion concerning his film "With Morning Hearts" (MacDougall 2001b), David MacDougall thus explains:

... the distinction between observation and participation was always too crude, and furthermore ... it's important not to distinguish between the two only in terms of obvious collaboration and camera style. Participation has just as much, perhaps more, to do with how the filmmaker participates in the lives and physical space of the subjects. By the same token, observation can be deeply immersed rather than ... objectifying. ... I think the distinction between observation and participation is ... based on a false premise — that the terms are of the same order and are mutually exclusive. (MacDougall & Grimshaw 2002: 95)

The notion of authorship is central to David MacDougall's re-consideration of "participatory cinema as one of collaboration and joint authorship" as envisaged in 1975 and tested through their Australian films. In retrospect, MacDougall found this experience "leading to a confusion of perspectives and a restraint on each party's declaring its true interests" (MacDougall 2003b: 129f; see also MacDougall in Grimshaw & Papastergiadis 1995: 45).<sup>22</sup> When I asked David MacDougall to elaborate on these issues, he explained to me:

We made some films that were quite collaborative. But my conclusion finally was that it tended to be confusing because the audience looking at this had no idea whose perspective was being represented by the film. It was always blurred and ambiguous. And it would be much better if I made my film and if the subject wants to make a film they would make their film. ... If you're trying to make an analysis of a situation as a scholar or as an artist then you have the responsibility to be clear about what you're doing. To make your statement and people can accept it or reject it. (personal communication 30.5.2014)

In the same conversation, MacDougall also expressed some concerns about the cinematic quality of his and Judith MacDougall's Australian films originating from the particular cultural context and its perceived incompatibility with (ethnographic) film:

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<sup>22</sup> Instead of joint authorship MacDougall therefore proposed a principle of multiple authorship, addressing the different and sometimes conflicting views of those involved in the filmmaking (MacDougall 2003b: 129f). See David MacDougall (1992: 97) for the underlying concept of intertextual cinema.

I think none of the [Australian] films are very strong, partly because of questions of point of view. And the real difficulty of making films in Australian Aboriginal society, where the politics are so complex and where a lot of the context remains unstated because so much is understood. And often it's part of the cultural style not to express those things openly. (personal communication 30.5.2014; see also MacDougall 1992)

Anna Grimshaw (2001) interprets the MacDougalls' experience of sharing authorship rather critically. Denied of individual agency and authorship, she regards the filmmakers as being "trapped within a certain kind of intellectualism. They conceive the alternative to authority as a self-sacrificing kind of service, rather than a Rouchian 'adventure', an open-ended partnership in which new, unimagined forms are invented through the collaboration itself" (Grimshaw 2001: 145). Such a view must be understood in the context of Grimshaw's more general perception of the MacDougalls' filmmaking as the "enlightenment project of anthropological cinema" (2001: 122). Following Grimshaw, the MacDougalls' participatory films are premised on "respect and distance" (Grimshaw 2001: 101), engaging the audience at the level of thinking rather than feeling (2001: 123).

While I share some of Anna Grimshaw's (2001) interpretations of the MacDougalls' work, such as the atmosphere of distance in most of their films, her argument is based on a somewhat simplified juxtaposition of the MacDougalls' and Jean Rouch's work – and oppositional attributes such as darkness vs. light and feeling vs. thinking. What I find most remarkable about the two Australian films described above is the filmmakers' absence. Even though they are audible and sometimes even visible, their own perspective and their own agenda – as one of several ones represented in each film – does not come across. This was confirmed by David MacDougall:

I never felt that we sort of found a voice ... that was both genuinely the filmmakers' voice but also dealt effectively with the subject. ... I think we were much more successful with the Turkana films. And then later when I began to work on these school films, I think then I found a kind cinematic approach that was more personal and more successful in filmmaking terms. But ... it also allowed me to keep trying

new things. It wasn't just finding one style and sticking to it. I was always trying to do something different with the next film. (personal communication 30.5.2014)

Interestingly, the question of authorship also plays a central role in the video workshops for children, which David MacDougall has been conducting. Since the mid-1990s MacDougall's research and filmmaking has been guided by an interest in the socialisation of children and the role of educational institutions with a focus on India (see for example MacDougall 1999, 2001b, 2008). During his work at the Doon School in 2003 and at the Prayas Children's Home in 2005, MacDougall started to conduct video workshops with children in order to learn about their perspectives (email 4.11.2013). This long-lasting interest has resulted in a research project called "Childhood and Modernity: Indian Children's perspective" which has been funded by the Australian Research council since 2010. In cooperation with schools and NGOs, MacDougall has conducted a number of video workshops in different parts of India, each involving six to twelve children and lasting from eight to ten weeks. After a basic camera training the participants, aged from ten to thirteen years, explore a self-chosen topic using the camera as a "type of research tool. They are encouraged to take this process seriously—as an important contribution that they can make" (MacDougall 2014: 454). The general aim of the project is to learn about Indian society from the perspective of children. It has five interconnected objectives:

(1) to create visual records of India today from the unique perspectives of Indian children; (2) to contribute more generally to a better understanding of children's interests and distinctive ways of seeing; (3) to provide materials for interdisciplinary analysis of contemporary Indian society ... (4) to preserve a visual and aural record of children's physical surroundings in early twenty-first century India, as a kind of time capsule and resource for future study; and (5) to provide a worthwhile experience for the children themselves, through which they may gain a more mature understanding of the world around them (MacDougall 2014: 454).

Four short films resulting from a video workshop conducted at a Delhi primary school in 2012 were recently published as an anthology film called *Delhi at Eleven* (MacDougall et al. 2013). The films of four eleven-year old students deal not only with different aspects of domestic life, work and education, but also gender roles and gender inequality. After being screened widely at film festivals

MacDougall asked a number of anthropologists and other scholars to write about their perception of these films, resulting in a collection of thought provoking reviews (Banerjee 2014; Doron 2014; Froerer 2014; Ginsburg 2014; Grimshaw 2014; Mankekar 2014; Petheram 2014; Ragazzi 2014). Due to his own central role in the project as initiator, trainer and film editor, MacDougall perceives the resulting films as collaborative, as he explained to me in an email:

Undoubtedly I had an influence on the approach the films take, because of my emphasis on the children learning to look at things around them with a camera, which was quite a foreign concept in many ways. ... My emphasis was on using the camera as a tool to explore the world immediately around them. Then, too, in the editing, my influence would have been an important part of the collaboration, because I helped shape the material in its final form, although I always tried to remain true to the children's intentions. (email 4.11.2013)

At the same time, MacDougall highlighted the children's work as individual authors. For example, he told me about the problems that arose when twelve children made a single film together during his first workshop: "It was very difficult to arrive at a subject to begin with. They finally had to agree upon a topic. And then they all contributed something to the film but there is no room left for much creative initiative, because they all have to work as a team." Consequently, MacDougall opted for individual films during the subsequent workshop, as "...there is also much more room for them to be individual in their approach. They don't have to cooperate with eleven others" (personal communication 30.5.2014).

The notion of individual authorship plays an important role in David MacDougall's own filmmaking as well as the video workshops he organises for children. This is somewhat surprising given the great potential inherent in collaborations and joint authorship. While I sometimes experienced great difficulties whilst producing co-authored films, my experience with such experiments is generally much more positive, as I will outline in Chapters four and six. In summary, David MacDougall's initial concept of a *participatory cinema* was never fully realised through his and Judith MacDougall's practical filmmaking. Today, his notion of participation refers to the filmmaker's participation in the lives of his or her

protagonists rather than their more concrete or literal participation in the process of filmmaking (see for example MacDougall & Grimshaw 2002). When protagonists influence the filmmaking more directly or in the case of his own impact on the films produced during his video workshops, David MacDougall uses the term “collaboration”. The work of David and Judith MacDougall highlights two aspects important in the context of participatory filmmaking as I perceive it: Firstly, it alludes to the difficulties an anthropologist or filmmaker might experience when sharing authorship, or giving up control and “handing over” aspects of the filmmaking to the protagonists. Secondly, the MacDougalls’ work highlights the continued importance of observational filmmaking as an ethnographic method and the significance of the filmmakers’ participation in the everyday lives of his or her protagonists.

### **3.2. Indigenous Filmmaking: Mediations of Culture**

Ethnographic film no longer occupies a singular niche. Other voices call to us in forms and modes that blur the boundaries and genres that represent distinctions between fiction and documentary, politics and culture, here and there. (Nichols 1991: 31)

In the late 1980s, an increasing number of films made by those who had traditionally been considered only as the objects of anthropological research began to emerge all over the world. Indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, the United States and Latin America started to produce their own films, television programmes and other media forms – often supported by anthropologists.<sup>23</sup> During the same period, the authority of anthropological representations, and especially of ethnographic film, was being questioned both within and outside the field (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Nichols 1991; Weinberger 1994). Discussions of

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<sup>23</sup> A precursor to these developments was the “Navajo Project” undertaken by Sol Worth and John Adair (1972). Worth and Adair attempted to train their Navajo participants to make 16mm films, but deliberately did not teach them about Western production or editing conventions. From the resulting films, Worth and Adair wanted to find out if there was a distinctive Navajo way of seeing the world, to draw more general conclusions about their perception and culture. While these films were groundbreaking in the sense that they enabled the participants to produce their own films, the study was rather short-lived, and neglected the social and political processes that surrounded the media production (Ginsburg 1995: 67).

*indigenous media* (Ginsburg 1991) and its relationship to ethnographic filmmaking became extremely prominent in the field of visual anthropology. The debate quickly became controversial (for example Ruby 1995; Turner 1995) and even heated (Weiner 1997). While some scholars presented indigenous media as inauthentic, and its introduction as potentially harmful to the respective communities (Weiner 1997), others argued that the appropriation of video technology by indigenous peoples was an important step in their struggle for self-determination, and opened up an important new area of research (Michaels 1986; Ginsburg 1991; Turner 1991; Aufderheide 1995).

Faye Ginsburg, who provided the first general theoretical discussion of indigenous media (Turner 1992: 5) and coined the term accordingly (Peterson 2003: 206) defines indigenous media rather exclusively as the work of “original inhabitants of areas later colonized by settler states ... struggling to sustain their own identities and claims to culture and land, surviving as *internal colonies* within encompassing nation-states” such as can be found in Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Canada, and Latin America (Ginsburg et al. 2002a: 25; emphasis added). Their efforts to appropriate video and television technology were “provoked” (to use her term) by several factors, such as these peoples’ growing desire to control the images made of them, the often unwelcome introduction of cable television in remote areas, and the advent of relatively inexpensive video equipment (1995: 67). In the context of increasing cultural and political pressure on indigenous communities, their activities in this field are perceived by Ginsburg as a form of “cultural activism” – a conscious form of “self-determination, cultural maintenance, and the prevention of cultural disruption” (Ginsburg 1995: 70). While their work is frequently produced and consumed exclusively within the communities to which its makers belong, it may also be shaped by a more cosmopolitan context and aimed at a wider, and even international audience. What these works share with media produced by “other [non-indigenous] minoritized subjects who have become involved in creating their own representational framework as a counter to dominant systems” is a “creative and self-conscious process of objectification” (Ginsburg 1999: 303). While Ginsburg considers all these productions as forms of cultural activism, the

differences between the work of indigenous media-makers (in this strict sense) and other community-based media are not elaborated.

The mediating qualities of ethnographic and indigenous media productions are central to the work of Faye Ginsburg, who uses the term *media* to encompass video and television in addition to film. More importantly, Ginsburg emphasises that both ethnographic and indigenous media are intended to communicate and create understanding between different groups, referring to the *American College Dictionary*'s definitions of the noun *medium* as "an intervening substance, through which a force acts or an effect is produced, [2] an agency, means or instrument" and the verb *to mediate* as "to act between parties to effect an understanding, compromise, reconciliation" (cited in Ginsburg 1991: 104).<sup>24</sup> While ethnographic films ideally mediate across gaps of "space and cultural difference", work produced by "minorities about themselves", is concerned with mediating "ruptures of time and history – to heal disruptions in cultural knowledge, historical memory, and identity between generations due to the tragic but familiar litany of assaults – taking of lands, political violence, introduction of disease, expansion of capitalist interests and tourism, and unemployment coupled with loss of traditional bases of subsistence" commonly found within indigenous communities (Ginsburg 1991: 104).

Ethnographic and indigenous media are conceived as being complementary expressions of the wider project of "representing, mediating, and understanding culture" (Ginsburg 1995: 65). Ginsburg proposes contrasting the work produced in different genres, in order to provide a wider, more comprehensive view of the cultural and social phenomena they depict. Inspired by Jean Rouch's "regards comparés" – events he organised in order to provide insights into a certain ethnic group or anthropological subject by presenting films made by various anthropologists, filmmakers and artists, along with those made by members of the group under consideration<sup>25</sup> – Ginsburg evokes the metaphor of the "parallax effect" (1995: 66). This astronomical term describes differences in the perceived

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<sup>24</sup> Ginsburg does not list this reference in her bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> For an overview see the website of the "Comité du Film Ethnographique" (2012).



movement of objects as the observer changes his or her relative position, demonstrating the advantage of juxtaposing different perspectives on the same subject in order to develop a deeper understanding. Although the individual works may have originally been intended for other purposes and specific audiences, in advocating the juxtaposition of multiple contrasting genres and styles, Ginsburg proposes an approach to ethnographic and indigenous media that allows the consideration of individual cases within a common analytical framework (1995: 70).

Terence Turner (1992) emphasises the differences between ethnographic and indigenous media. He contends that in contrast to ethnographic filmmakers, the producers of indigenous videos work within the same set of “cultural categories, notions of representations, principles of mimesis, and aesthetic values and notions of what is socially and politically important” as their protagonists – and their intended audiences (Turner 1992: 8). Since these guiding principles are more readily apparent in the production of the film than in the finished product, he chooses the filmmaking process as the main focus of his anthropological analysis. Working extensively with the Kayapo Indians in the Brazilian Amazon as both an activist and anthropologist, Turner is mainly interested in the (social, political and cultural) impact of filmmaking on indigenous communities and their relationships with the dominant Western social system. He offers a detailed description of the social and political dynamics affected by the medium’s increasing presence; the question of access to the medium being a major source of conflict (Turner 1992, 1991).

While, in Turner’s accounts, access to the technology was mainly regulated through existing power structures, he describes how specific actors tried to improve their position: the people who worked as camerapersons or video editors combined a prestigious position within the community with the possibility of mediating with the outside world, and were thereby able to accumulate symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2011) and other resources necessary for political leadership (see also Flores 2009: 215f). Many Kayapo working with Turner were thus able to gain or reinforce their political power, while some politically ambitious young men took up filmmaking in order to enhance their careers

(Turner 1992: 6f; see also MacDougall 1987: 56). The “monopolization of control” over video production reinforced numerous social conflicts, counteracting Turner’s efforts to provide equal access to the whole community – and consequently interfering with his entire project (Turner 1991: 73). In the light of these events, Turner argues that everyone initiating or taking part in such activities must be held accountable: “Precisely *whom* she/he hands [the camera] to can become a very touchy question, and may involve consequences for which the researcher bears inescapable responsibility” (1992: 7; emphasis in the original). While for the most part the Kayapo documented cultural or political events, such as traditional cultural activities, meetings of leaders, or the foundation of new communities, video was not primarily perceived as a passive recording device, but rather consciously employed to authenticate or objectify the events it recorded:

The representation of transient events in a medium like video, with its capacity to fix the image of an event and to store it permanently in a form that can circulate in the public domain, objectively accessible to all exactly in the same way, make it a potent means of conferring upon private and contingent acts the character of established public facts. (Turner 1992: 11)

Whereas the idea of a common “culture” or the perception of a common ethnic identity had been absent amongst the Kayapo at the time of Turner’s arrival in the 1960s they increasingly used their newly perceived cultural difference as a resource in their political struggle against expropriation and assimilation. Importantly, this “new self-conscious objectification of ... their own culture as an object of political value and struggle” was connected to their “ability to objectify themselves through the audiovisual media of the dominant culture” (Turner 1991: 70; see also Aufderheide 1995: 83). In their filmmaking the Kayapo combined traditional cultural elements, ranging from ritual dancing and masking to war ceremonies and political rhetoric, with the technology and symbols of the dominant Western society. According to Turner, the combination of these two parallel aspects – the ability to integrate Western elements into one’s own culture, and thus control them at one’s own terms, and the capacity to objectify one’s culture in a way that can be used to mobilise collective action – constitutes

an important means by which indigenous peoples can increase the possibilities of their cultural and political survival (1992: 9-12).

Filming became a central element of the Kayapo's political struggle, and with it, the act of shooting acquired an important role. Turner describes how the filmmaking Kayapo became a preferred image of representatives of the international media, reporting on the protest against the planned "Belo Monte" hydroelectric dam near Altamira on the Xingu River. When the Kayapo realised the potential offered by a high-profile presence in the international press, they began to deliberately intensify their filming activities during public events (Turner 1992: 7). Turner claims that filmmaking, in combination with international support from celebrities such as Sting, amongst others, contributed considerably to the success of the Kayapo's resistance against the Brazilian state and the World Bank. This resistance led to the temporary termination of the *Belo Monte* project and the creation of a series of reserves for the population of about 4000 Kayapo which, at the time of Turner's writing, added up to an area the size of Scotland (Turner 1992: 14).<sup>26</sup>

Other scholars have presented more critical views of indigenous media productions. In his culture-critical (and rather polemical) analysis of Ginsburg's and Turner's work, James Weiner (1997) argues that the inherently Western medium of film depends on concepts of subjectivity and representation absent in non-Western cultures. The representatives of those cultures, he believes, are therefore incapable of appropriating the medium successfully, and instead produce "a sort of ersatz difference" (208). James Faris (1992) argues that the Kayapo filmmakers "are situated by the West, which gives them little room to be anything more than the West will allow" (176). Jay Ruby (1991, 1995, 2000), while acknowledging the facilitation and study of indigenous media as possible alternatives for visual anthropologists in the light of the need to drastically reconsider the field, sees a major problem in the issue of funding: "Historically, the life of innovative media projects among people who do not have a tradition of

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<sup>26</sup> For a similarly positive view of the medium's impact on indigenous land rights (in this case, however, produced by an anthropologist) see Prins (2002: 59).

imagemaking is not long – when the funds from outside dry up, so do the pictures” (Ruby 1995: 78).

Peter Ian Crawford (1995) raises the question of whether the Kayapo’s media presence<sup>27</sup> actually served their own political interests, or whether they and their environment were appropriated by environmental pressure groups operating with global interests. Crawford observes the centrality of conflicts with outsiders in the Kayapo’s public media image (for example Beckham & Turner 1989), while films the Kayapo made for their own use are more focused on environmental knowledge and aspects of indigenous culture. Referring to James Faris (1992), Crawford reminds us of the power structures embedded in Western technology and further argues that the Kayapo’s concepts of nature might not be compatible with those of the West:

It may have short term positive media effect to focus on environmental issues and nature but these concepts are not universal, but rather culture- and contextdependent. The modern concept of nature, which helped define non-Western cultures as ‘primitive’ and ‘traditional’ in the first place, is formed so as to give short term advantages to modern society rather than to secure the long term survival of humanity in general let alone the Kayapó. (Crawford 1995: 16)

The Kayapo might thus end up in a “cultural paradox triggered by their ideological importance as an example of a society which has actually managed to take care of its environment” (Crawford 1995: 17). Unmasking notions of “traditional” culture or society as ideological constructions, Crawford describes a cultural paradox in which many societies find themselves trapped within a label of “traditional”. If they do not match the cultural attributes predefined (by outsiders), they lose certain privileges. At the time when he was writing his paper in 1994, Crawford saw the Kayapo leaders as divided into those who were “traditionalists” and those who were “modernists”. Whereas an emphasis on “traditional” society might force the Kayapo into a kind of “human zoo” situation, in which cultural autonomy would still be possible, though only in designated

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<sup>27</sup> Following Crawford, their popularity with Western media can be attributed amongst other reasons to the fact that the Kayapo combine images (and imaginations) of the “primitive” and “modern” that are apparently popular with Western image producers (Crawford 1995: 13f).

areas, “modernisation” on the other hand might result in the wholesale demise of Kayapo culture, and possibly even ethnocide. While Crawford (1995: 19) therefore emphasises that indigenous media projects warrant “careful and consistent critical scrutiny”, he underlines his positive provisional assessment with a quote from Kayapo filmmaker Mokuka: “Just because I use a white man’s camera, I don’t dress in the white man’s clothes!”

Current trends in indigenous media seem to support this positive outlook. Indigenous image-making continues to be an important aspect of both the negotiation of cultural identity and of political struggle:

Indigenous media work has shown itself to be a particularly robust form of contemporary cultural objectification. From small-scale video and local radio to archival websites to national television stations and feature films, indigenous media makers have found opportunities for cultural creativity of all sorts. These projects often support the maintenance or even revival of ritual practices and local languages, while building forms of cultural labor that repair fraying intergenerational relationships and bring much-needed sources of productive activity, and at times income, into communities that suffer from high rates of unemployment. (Ginsburg 2011: 238)

These activities are clearly visible through the ongoing work of different organisations dedicated to the production, facilitation, archiving and distribution of indigenous media, such as *PAW Media and Communications* in Australia, *Video nas Aldeias* (Video in the Villages) in Brazil and *Isuma TV* in Canada, amongst others. Despite access to the Internet being limited in many indigenous areas, the medium constitutes an important and influential new way to distribute films, as well as serving as a channel for indigenous representation and communication more generally (Prins 2002: 70ff; see also Ferreira 2009). The significance of media produced by indigenous and marginalised groups is confirmed by scholars from media anthropology (Dracklé 1999, 2000; Ginsburg et al. 2002b) and media and communication studies (Rodriguez et al. 2010).

Indigenous media images still play an important role in raising awareness and funds for international NGOs lobbying for both indigenous peoples and environmental issues, such as *Amazon Watch*, *Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker*

(Society for Threatened Peoples), and *Survival International* – as has already been demonstrated by the *Video for the Villages Project* (Aufderheide 1995), or more recently the presentation of the indigenous film *We Struggle But We Eat Fruit* (Pinhanta & Pinhanta 2006) in various German cities. In the case of the latter, Moisés and Benki Piyãko from Acre in Brazil were invited by the *Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* to visit Germany in order to inform the wider public and raise awareness about their situation. Illustrating the continuing role of anthropologists in advocacy, their visit was organised by anthropologist Eliane Fernandes Ferreira, who specialises in indigenous peoples' use of the internet in Brazil (2009). At the time of writing, the Kayapo's aforementioned fight against the *Belo Monte* hydroelectric dam is still ongoing, and continues to make use of highly mediatised events (see for example Fairgrave 2009).

The medium of film acquired yet another dimension with reference to indigenous issues when Hollywood director James Cameron and actress Sigourney Weaver joined the PR campaign against *Belo Monte* (Barrionuevo 2010). Their film *Avatar* (2009) about an extraterrestrial people's fight against environmental destruction caused by mining, can be interpreted as a parable of the Kayapo's struggle. The degree to which the Kayapo's media images are part of an orchestrated PR campaign is demonstrated by an intriguing internet video called *James Cameron Brings Arnold Schwarzenegger to the Amazon* (Amazon Watch 2011). The four minute long piece follows the two Hollywood stars as they are flown to a small indigenous village on the bank of the Xingu River in a seaplane, greeted with dance and song by a crowd of villagers, and finally exchange information and words of sympathy with Kayapo leaders, among them Chief Raoni. Interestingly, anthropologist Terence Turner appears in the video as one of the interpreters, almost 20 years after his initial research, thereby demonstrating his ongoing engagement with the Kayapo and their struggle. The visit was obviously arranged as a media event, and suggests that the Kayapo are part of an international network involving politics, money, publicity and anthropology. The various members of this network are certainly not collaborating as equal partners, but the example shows that this kind of filmmaking should not be viewed as an isolated activity threatened by lack of

funding (Ruby 1995), but rather as embedded in a host of diverse activities through which the Kayapo negotiate their position nationally and even globally.

Whilst media productions have proved to be an important cultural and political innovation for those communities that have engaged in them, of the various aspects highlighted in this chapter, there are three elements that are particularly relevant to the further discussion of my own work.

First of all, small-scale filmmaking does have cultural, social and political effects, both within the communities with which it is concerned and on a wider, national and even global scale. Possible conflicts that might be reinforced by the implementation of such projects at the local level are an important aspects that need to be taken into consideration (Turner 1992, 1991). In this context Peter Ian Crawford (1995) reminds of the risk that such ventures might serve the interests of “outside” advocates or funding bodies rather than the participating communities.

Secondly, the literature on indigenous media supports the notion that the medium of film has genuine potential as a form of mediation both between and within different groups (Ginsburg 1991).

Thirdly, it reaffirms the notion of juxtaposing such films with other forms of media representation as an approach to knowledge production (Ginsburg 1995). As compared to ethnographic film, indigenous media is a field in which the participants produce their own media while anthropologists become facilitators, analysts or advocates of the process.

### **3.3. Participatory Video**

Video can enable under-represented and non-literate people to use their own visual languages and oral traditions to retrieve, debate, and record their own knowledge. Moreover, these recordings may enable excluded people to enter into negotiation with those in power over them, and to challenge the representations of others. (Braden 1998: 19)

*Participatory Video* (PV) is an approach intended to enable representatives of marginalised groups to discuss and communicate their concerns by means of video – initially to others within their own peer group, and subsequently to outside audiences, such as representatives of donor organisations or politicians. PV projects are usually short-term: the participants of PV workshops receive some basic training in shooting and editing and are encouraged to make films about a subject that is agreed upon (Braden 1998). The process of filmmaking is the central aspect of PV, viewed as a “tool to facilitate interaction and enable self-expression” (White 2003c: 65). The method is intended to enhance self-awareness on an individual level, and foster trust, cooperation and identity within groups. While PV is mostly employed within development projects, it may also be applied in a range of other contexts, such as academic research and advocacy (Lunch & Lunch 2006). Due to the fact that my professional role lies somewhere between, or perhaps, more specifically, within the region of overlap between, the fields of research and development, I have been confronted with discourses of participation throughout my commissioned work, and both *Bridging the Gap* and *Liparu Lyetu* were produced using a PV approach. I shall therefore clarify the position of my work in relation to PV.

### **3.3.1. The Foundations of PV**

We define participation in development as a process of equitable and active involvement of all stakeholders in the formulation of development policies and strategies and in the analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development activities. To allow for a more equitable development process, disadvantaged stakeholders need to be empowered to increase their level of knowledge, influence and control over their own livelihoods, including development initiatives affecting them. (FAO 2012)

Most generally, participation means to “take part or become involved in something” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online 2012), but there is also a societal and political connotation to the term “participatory”, communicating a sense of “involving members of the community in decisions; allowing members of the general public to take part” (Simpson et al. 1989: 269). The notion of *citizen participation* emerged in the 1960s, when scientists and policy makers became



interested in the involvement of individuals in political processes (Verba & Nie 1972). The exclusion of marginalised groups from decision-making processes, and the question of how they could be included played an important role in these discussions (Arnstein 2007) and must be understood in the context of broader social and political developments, such as the struggle for racial and gender equality. Such concerns were paralleled by demands to liberate marginalised people in the so-called Third World. One work that is often referred to as pioneering is Brazilian Paulo Freire's (1977) "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", in which he argues that the development of a critical consciousness "empowers" the poor to understand their situation and to take measures against poverty and oppression. Freire rejected the notion of a hierarchical relationship between teacher and students in favour of a situation in which the latter controlled the content of their learning according to their own interests and needs (Wagner 2001). "Empowerment" was seen as a form of radical societal transformation through individual and class action, resulting in changes in law, property rights, and other aspects of society (Cleaver 1999: 599). From the late 1970s, these ideas gained increasing acceptance amongst development scholars and practitioners: the rural poor who were usually the "beneficiaries" of development projects should be able to influence "the forces which control their livelihoods" (Oakley 1991).

Due to the perceived shortcomings of the top-down approaches of donor-driven and outsider-led development, the *development industry*<sup>28</sup> increasingly began to adopt participatory methods based on the inclusion of local perspectives, priorities, knowledge and skills in the planning and execution of their programmes (Cooke & Kothari 2004a). *Participatory Rural Appraisal* (PRA), a set of methods intended to "enable rural people to share, enhance, and analyze their knowledge" (Chambers 1994: 953), became the dominant form of enquiry within development cooperation. With the exception of certain interview techniques, PRA methods are characterised by "shared visual representations and analysis

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<sup>28</sup> This term may be used to circumscribe the social arena made up of governmental organisations, NGOs and researchers discussing and implementing development issues (see for example Cooke & Kothari 2004a). It emphasises the economic and businesslike nature of such activities.

by local people, such as mapping or modelling on the ground or paper; estimating, scoring and ranking with seeds, stones, sticks or shapes” (Chambers 1994: 959) – methods believed to be more suited to the rural and often illiterate participants of development projects.

A second approach that contributed to the development of PV was initiated in the mid-1960, in the context of the aforementioned debate on citizen participation, by the *National Film Board of Canada’s* (NFB) *Challenge for Change* film programme. The aim of the programme was to document poverty and to explore the film medium’s potential for facilitating social change. Participatory video is usually represented as having its roots in the *Fogo Process*, which formed part of that programme (see for example Lunch & Lunch 2006; White 2003d; Frantz 2007). Fogo Island, situated off the east coast of Newfoundland, was chosen by the NFB as a location for filmmaking, due to the community’s poverty and remoteness. Around 60 % of the 5000 inhabitants depended on social welfare, and the government had made plans to resettle the entire community (Crocker 2003: 125ff). The initial idea – that of teaching the villagers how to make their own films – was never implemented, but the protagonists were asked for their feedback during the editing and were granted considerable control over the images made of them:

[The filmmakers] told the people that footage would only be shot with their permission, that the people on screen would be the first to see the rushes and would be able to demand the removal of anything they did not like or felt ashamed of. ... They were promised that they would approve the final edit, and that none of the films would be shown outside their villages or outside the island without their permission. (Hénaut 1991: 86)

This approach established trust and confidence amongst the islanders. The team assembled around director Colin Low produced around 30 films on Fogo Island, mostly portrait films between 10 and 20 minutes long, dealing with issues that were important to the villagers, such as fishing, trade, education, welfare, and the situation of their children.<sup>29</sup> The films were widely screened within the community, contributing to mutual understanding and to the identification of

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<sup>29</sup> Many of these films can be viewed online at the NFB website (see NFB 2012).

common problems and solutions amongst the islanders. In a second stage, some of the films were shown to representatives of the regional government as a means by which to communicate the islanders' perspectives to those in power. Eventually the villagers managed to resist the government's resettlement plans and formed their own fishing cooperative in order to generate a worthwhile income. While these subsequent events cannot be directly causally linked to the *Fogo Process*, sociologist Stephen Crocker assumes "that the filming process played a large role in opening channels of communication both among the island communities, and between the island and the government" (2003: 128; see also Nigg 1980: 20). Don Snowden, who had initiated the filmmaking on Fogo Island on behalf of the Memorial University of Newfoundland, made further advances using a similar approach, first with other marginalised communities in Canada and later in India and Bangladesh, where he facilitated projects very similar in form to current PV practices (Crocker 2003: 136).<sup>30</sup>

Combining participatory approaches from development initiatives with insights gained from the *Fogo Process*, the proponents of PV argue that filmmaking is a form of participatory communication that "empowers" the participants at multiple levels: on a personal level, it is argued that it promotes "self/other respect, a sense of belonging, a feeling of importance, a claim to an identity" (White 2003c: 65). At a communal level, the filmmaking process, in conjunction with community feedback screenings, is supposed to strengthen communication, trust and cohesion within the community. On a broader level, the intention is that grassroots stakeholders become equal partners of development agencies in the formulation of their development goals (White 2003b: 67ff). It must be repeated, however, that the underlying causal chain between filmmaking, "empowerment" remains rather hypothetical; a point that is even acknowledged by proponents of the approach:

The power of video to transform behaviours is not yet fully explored. Additionally, it is not adequately theorized nor are informed links made between theory and

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<sup>30</sup> The underlying ideas of the "Fogo Process" are also seen as a foundation of community media projects in the UK (Nigg & Wade 1980; Nigg 1980) and the US (Ruby 2000: 209f).

practice. In fact, participatory communication as a practice is clearly lacking in meaningful conceptualizations and useful theory. (White 2003a: 29)

### **3.3.2. Critique of Participatory Approaches**

Participation has dominated the development discourse and practice since the 1980s to the extent that it has become its “new orthodoxy” (Henkel & Stirrat 2004). Participatory approaches are also well established in both research (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995) and urban planning (Sandercock & Attili 2010). Today it is, politically speaking, almost impossible to implement any substantial project in research, development or planning that does not incorporate elements addressing the issue of “stakeholder inclusion”. At the same time, participatory approaches have been placed under increasing scrutiny since the 1990s. While most of the resulting criticism has been aimed at various methodological shortcomings, the edited book *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (Cooke & Kothari 2004b) presents a first, more fundamental and Foucauldian critique, suggesting that participation “can both conceal and reinforce oppressions and injustices in its various manifestations” (Cooke & Kothari 2004a: 13). Essentially, the authors argue that participatory approaches and methods are embedded in power relations, and are themselves exercises of power (Hailey 2004; Taylor 2004; Henkel & Stirrat 2004; Kothari 2004).

Uma Kothari (2004) emphasises the constructedness of (local) knowledge. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault (1995, 2010), she argues that power permeates all levels of society and manifests itself in social and cultural practices. Local knowledge is thus not a commodity, readily available to local people, as it is often represented as being in participatory discourse, but is rather “culturally, socially and politically produced and ... continuously reformulated as a powerful normative construct” (Kothari 2004: 141). Kothari (2004: 144f) emphasises the difficulty of unveiling the underlying power relations, as these are accepted as given and reproduced through processes of self-surveillance and *normalization* (Foucault 1995). This argument is underlined by geographer Mike Kesby (2005), who writes that “power is most effective and most insidious where it is normalized, where self-expectation, self-regulation, and self-discipline generate compliant subjects who actively reproduce hegemonic assemblages of

power without being “forced” to do so” (2005: 2040). What Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) facilitators might, then, naively perceive as uncontested “local” knowledge or culture might in fact be based on processes of normalization and subjection (see also Henkel & Stirrat 2004: 178).

David Mosse (2004) points out that participatory processes are themselves characterised by control and dominance: “project staff ‘own’ the research tools,<sup>31</sup> choose the topics, record the information, and abstract and summarize according to project criteria of relevance” (19). He further argues that participants’ priorities and needs are usually shaped by their perception of what the project with which they are involved is able to deliver (23f). Participatory processes may therefore legitimise and implement decisions already made by development agencies or donors (see also Hildyard et al. 2004; Taylor 2004). Moreover, as participatory methods are usually based on consensual decisions, divergent interests tend to be obscured and existing power relations reproduced (see also Kothari 2004: 160; Mohan 2004). Rather than “empowering” beneficiaries therefore, participatory approaches might actually contribute to the implementation of the aims of agencies and donors more efficiently (Cleaver 2004), to secure compliance with existing power structures (Taylor 2004), to incorporate participants into the Western project of modernisation (Henkel & Stirrat 2004), or to subvert more radical factions of society (Hailey 2004). Drawing on Erving Goffman (2010), Uma Kothari (2004: 148f) interprets participatory processes themselves as performances:

The development practitioner initiating a PRA is asking participants to adopt and play a role using certain techniques and tools, thus shaping and, in some instances, confining the way in which performers may have chosen to represent themselves. The stage and the props for the performance may be alien to the performer. The tools provided can limit the performance so that the performers are unable to convey what they want to; the stage has been set by others and the form of the performance similarly guided by them. The resulting communication or dialogue are then fraught with confusion and ambiguity. (Kothari 2004: 149)

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<sup>31</sup> If the medium of film is used, the power inherent in the – essentially Western – technology must also be considered (Faris 1992; Crawford 1995).

Kothari claims that the participants need to be “good actors” and that those people who either do not possess the required skills or do not wish to perform within these predetermined frameworks will be misrepresented, or even not represented at all. At the same time, drawing on Michel Foucault (2010) and Anthony Giddens’ (1984) work on structure and agency, Kothari acknowledges that the participants “can have enough power to carve out spaces of control” in these performances (2004: 150) and that individuals have the capacity “to fashion their own existence” as active agents more generally (2004: 151). Even though she does not elaborate on the ways in which participatory processes might develop such potential, she contends that

... there is a possibility of resistance or subversion through people’s performance in participatory exercises. Just as the PRA ‘expert’ is performing, so too are the participants or recipients of development aid. Through their performance they can invert power relations in small and big ways. (Kothari 2004: 151)

These ideas are elaborated by Mike Kesby (2005), who contends that agency, self-reflexivity and “empowerment” are not attributes of individuals, but have to be maintained through discursive and practical means – in other words, in a manner analogous to the way in which power is maintained. He further argues that participatory workshops may constitute “other spaces” (Foucault & Miskowiec 1986), temporary social arenas in which it is possible to practice and perform such discourses and activities leading to what he calls “empowered agency”:

Within them, normal frameworks of privilege are circumvented by the discourses and practices of equity, free speech and collaboration. Participants ... can draw on the techniques of participation in order to construct themselves as reflexive agents and constitute/represent their opinions and experiences to themselves, one another, and facilitators. Within this field, opportunities open up for people, first, to disentangle the complex web of everyday life ... second, to deconstruct norms and conventions; third, to reflect on the performativity of everyday life; and finally, to rehearse performances for alternative realities. (Kesby 2005: 2055)

However, Kesby emphasises that in order to render the effects of these performances sustainable beyond the safety of the workshop space, the

associated discourses and practices must become normalised, or embedded in everyday space. While Kesby emphasises the importance of establishing long-term and/or self-sustaining social groups in order to achieve sustainable “empowerment”, he does not explain how these “other spaces” differ from the highly criticised conventional workshops, nor does he describe how they could be implemented. My reading of Kesby suggests the existence of two interconnected spheres, or arenas of participation. On the one hand the workshop, seen as a performative space in which power is negotiated and the participants can exercise agency and even resistance; on the other, the wider social context, where power relations, discourses and other structural constraints are often overwhelming. While a simple causal relationship between participation, “empowerment” and social change, though implicit in many participatory projects, is certainly questionable, both Kothari and Kesby propose the view that participatory workshops may reverse power relations and enhance the participants’ agency. In order to properly assess participatory processes, however, it is necessary to carefully analyse these performances and elaborate on the question of if and how the forms of interaction thus instigated can be extended beyond the safety of the workshop space.

### **3.3.3. PV in Development and Applied Research**

Despite its theoretical shortcomings, and the criticisms that have been made of participatory approaches in general, PV is well established in development cooperation, where it is employed for a variety of purposes in the areas of research, planning, implementation and communication (Braden 1998; Lunch & Lunch 2006; Gruber 2008). At the same time, the method is being increasingly applied in other contexts, such as academic research (Kindon 2003; Mistry & Berardi 2011), training (Schmiedel et al. 2009), capacity development (Menter et al. 2006) and youth work (Siren Hope; personal communication on 16.12.2011). While participatory videos usually consist of interviews or activities filmed in a straightforward documentary style, PV may also incorporate dance, drama, songs and poems (Braden 1998: 92). PV projects, by their very nature, are not supposed to follow a given template, but rather are meant to be carefully adapted to the given situation. According to the field guide of one of the leading

PV service providers, the approach might typically involve the following steps (Lunch & Lunch 2006: 12):

1. The participants learn how to use video technology through engaging in various exercises.
2. The participants identify priority issues, according to which they then conceive and shoot their films.
3. The footage is screened to the community, facilitating a process of learning, sharing and exchange.
4. The finished films may be used for both “horizontal” communication (with other communities) and “vertical” communication (for example, with decision-makers at or beyond the local level).

Much of the literature on the subject differentiates between the process and product of PV (Menter et al. 2006; Crocker 2003; Lunch & Lunch 2006). While the process of filmmaking is widely regarded as its central aspect, accompanied by its various assumed-positive effects as described above, the value of the resulting product is assessed quite differently. Whereas White (2003c: 65) downplays the importance of the use of the films “beyond the immediate context” of the project, their value for both documentation and communication purposes is highlighted by Nick and Chris Lunch:

The films that result from the PV process can also be used in community-to-community exchange to spread ideas, and to encourage and inspire. They may even be relevant to communities in other countries with similar conditions and problems. PV can thus enhance the capacity of people to share their local knowledge and innovations across distances and to stimulate locally-led development in other countries. The films can be used to communicate the situation and ideas of local people to development workers and formal researchers and to decision-makers and policymakers. (Lunch & Lunch 2006: 13)

Menter et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of the product for the participants and describe how the expectations of facilitators and participants can clash. During their PV workshops with a group of young people in Peru, the



researchers realised that the production of a high quality end product was an important aim for the participants.

Our participants felt the facilitators should have intervened more to ensure the technical quality of the film was higher, and avoid some of the basic mistakes. This highlights the difference between the views of the facilitators and the young people regarding the relative importance of the process and the end product. For the facilitators, the process was more important, and technical glitches seen as less important than the participants' autonomy to make mistakes. But the participants placed more importance on the end product. (Menter et al. 2006: 113)

While this experience with a group of rather media-affine adolescents may not be fully representative of PV on the whole, it highlights the importance of taking the participants' technical and aesthetic preferences into consideration. In being able to making the end product as meaningful as possible, and in being encouraged to make decisions as to its precise nature, the participants can learn and practice new skills in a realistic situation and complete their workshop with an artefact that they can use for their own purposes (Menter et al. 2006).

#### **3.3.4. PV in Social Science Research**

A number of visual anthropologists work with participatory video in the contexts of development (for example Pugliese & Va 2009) and applied research (Schmiedel et al. 2009). Based on his work in an applied context, Peter Anton Zoettl (2012) discusses some social and cultural implications of participants' engagement in PV, and argues that the intensive discussions involved in making a film together contribute to a "deeper understanding ... about the raw material and the situation that engendered it" highlighting its possible role within anthropological research (5). Nevertheless, PV is rarely used as a method in academic anthropological research. Ethnographic filmmaking and visual ethnography, on the other hand, have relatively long traditions within anthropology (Banks 2003; Henley 2004; Postma & Crawford 2006b; Pink 2007). This strong image-making tradition might be a reason why the method of PV has been neglected within the discipline. Only recently has the potential of participatory video been discovered within the social sciences, mainly in human

geography (Kindon 2003; Mistry & Berardi 2011; Waite & Conn 2011) – a discipline that began its “visual turn” more recently (Rose 2003) and might, therefore, be more open towards alternative methods.

Sarah Kindon (2003), together with a freelance video facilitator, organised a PV workshop with a group of Maoris during her enquiry into the relationship between place, identity and social cohesion in New Zealand. The resulting videos, documenting oral histories and collective visits to significant places, among other aspects of Maori community life, were developed, shot and edited by community members in collaboration with the researchers. Kindon argues, from a feminist perspective, that using film as a research method potentially deconstructs the researcher’s distancing and objectifying gaze by making it explicit and so shifting attention more directly to power relations within the research situation (2003: 145f). Kindon suggests that the conception and execution of film projects in collaboration with the local participants constitutes a significantly different approach from more conventional ways of using the medium in which the technology remains in the hands of the researchers. Through capacity-building, the expert knowledge of video production and research is simultaneously shared and critiqued, thereby demystifying conventional media and research practices. In this context Kindon assigns a special importance to the fact that both she and her video facilitator colleague appear in the film along with the other participants:

Such movements of our bodies behind and in front of the camera – across the conventional boundary between researcher and researched – simultaneously positioned ... [the participants], as well as both the ... [video facilitator] and myself, as researchers *and* researched, observers *and* observed, and documentarians *and* documented. They symbolize a degree of destabilization of conventional power relations in the research relationship and of particular claims to the unquestioned transparency of the image. As a result, these movements have facilitated a more explicit recognition of the agency and situatedness of all participants in the politics of knowledge production associated with the project’s focus, and have contributed to a deeper level of trust and understanding within the research partnership itself. (Kindon 2003: 146f, emphasis in the original)

Kindon confirms the importance of the end product: while the resulting films were originally intended for internal project use, some community members proposed

the idea of using them for teaching and educating children, as well as that of sending them to community members living abroad. Such spontaneous ideas for extended application are considered as indicative of an appropriation of the medium, and an important sign of ownership. Furthermore, the practical training in filmmaking was very important and meaningful to the participants (Kindon 2003: 148). While Kindon emphasises the great amount of commitment and time necessary for the implementation of PV, she suggests that the method offers great potential, constituting a break with the hierarchical, extractive and objectifying ways of looking and engaging prevalent in much conventional (visual) research.

Jayalaxshmi Mistry and Andrea Berardi (2011) offer a similarly positive account of PV as a method of research. As part of their research into natural resource management in a rural area of Guyana, they were interested in discovering how indigenous *social memory*<sup>32</sup> influences natural resource management practices. The researchers hired and trained community members to record interviews with locals, using PV methodology, over a period of 18 months, which partially occurred during the researchers' absence. When they viewed the resulting material relating to the local people's memories of ecological crises, and that concerned with their current resource use, Mistry and Berardi realised that the community researchers had generated some useful and interesting material which, however, did not fit neatly into their research framework. Their first impulse was to steer the process back toward the direction they had initially intended, but they later realised that the shift in power represented by this turn of events was an important aspect of participatory research (Mistry & Berardi 2011: 4). Mistry and Berardi conclude that the use of PV may generate some "alternative, unexpected understandings, more representative of the participants' worldviews and realities" and that it may become necessary to adapt the research agenda in accord with this new information (2011: 4).

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<sup>32</sup> Social memory is defined as "the shared narratives that influence collective thoughts and actions, had emerged over time in response to significant social and ecological events" (Mistry & Berardi 2011: 2).

### 3.3.5. PV and Drama

In recent work another trend has become evident: that of combining PV with drama and fictionalisation. Geographers Louise Waite and Cath Conn (2011) developed the methodology of *Participatory Video Drama* (PVD) in the context of their research on young women's attitudes to sexual health issues in Uganda. During a PV workshop that they organised as part of their research, Waite and Conn realised that the participants enjoyed acting and decided to film a series of short improvised plays that reflected the women's experiences. While the researchers found that "PV offers participants an opportunity to de-stabilise the usual passive engagement with the dominant cultural form of film and become more actively involved in the media" (2011: 116), the use of drama constituted a means of self-presentation that was especially well suited to vulnerable research participants. When Waite and Conn proposed to the participants of their PV workshop that they might apply their newly acquired skills by filming the short plays both conceived and enacted by themselves, the members of the group declined the option of taking turns at shooting, since all of them wanted to be fully involved in performing.<sup>33</sup> The researchers therefore operated the camera, while the participants developed the dramas they intended to film by devising short stories, each about the life of a (fictional) young girl. The three films that resulted from this process all deal with the issue of a girl having to leave the parental home due to poverty. In each of the stories the main protagonist subsequently becomes involved with a man, in order to seek support and protection. However, in every story, the main character is eventually abused, or even raped and infected with HIV/AIDS. Dramatisation allowed the participants to discuss these difficult issues publicly, and thereby enhanced the PV process:

Drama means that participants do not have to speak out directly to a group in public as themselves but can take on a character and interact with other characters as 'active' agents in the narrative. The young women seemed to grow in confidence from the audience being obliged to be quiet, not interrupt, listen,

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<sup>33</sup> Even though the participants did not operate the camera themselves, the PV training was still considered as important since their knowledge of the process of filmmaking enhanced their confidence to act in front of the camera. Furthermore, the participants wanted their plays to be recorded in order to document their work and present it to their friends and families (Waite & Conn 2011: 120f).

and be 'passive' rather than distracting or interjecting as might be the case in a typical group discussion. As such, we argue that PVD has tremendous potential for accessing young people's voices, and for deepening participation. (Waite & Conn 2011: 124)

The three resulting films were interpreted with reference to socially relevant issues such as family life, gender relations and the limited choices faced by families in the case of economical downturns (Waite & Conn 2011: 127ff). In the words of Waite and Conn, PVD constituted a "rich source of embedded knowledge" that contributed significantly to the original research question (2011: 125). While the dramas are interpreted as projections of the women's collective desire for schooling, security and freedom of choice, among other things, they also suggest that it is very difficult for parents to protect their daughters from abuse in a hostile environment (Waite & Conn 2011: 127f). The researchers' understanding of the girls' performances as a form of resistance – expressed through humorous elements – is especially interesting:

The point about humour and other related techniques ... is that they are a subtle source of resistance, they make resistance possible because they are prosaic and indirect in an environment where it is difficult for young women to be directly resistant and critical. This makes the drama no less powerful as a means of resistance, indeed it may have even more impact on the audience. (Waite & Conn 2011: 127)

Fictionalisation provided the research participants with a means of discussing particularly difficult issues in a safe environment. Much as is the case with ethnofiction, this method generates embodied knowledge that can be approached as an important source of information. Johannes Sjöberg (2008, 2009) shows how important it is to take into account the different ways in which individual participants or actors interpret their roles. Waite and Conn (2011) rightly view the combination of PV and drama as a methodological advancement – one that has not been adequately discussed, even though it has been practiced within a number of development projects (see for example Braden 1998: 20; Bery 2003: 119; Koch 2008: 108ff). Referring their own activities to the relatively recent emergence of *Applied Theatre*, Waite and Conn (2011: 117) overlook the related *Theatre for Development* (TFD) approach originating in the

1970s (Breitinger 1994; Klink 2000; Epskamp 2006; Koch 2008).<sup>34</sup> Used as a “top-down” communication tool in development since the 1950s, the idea of working with theatre or drama as a method of facilitating “empowerment” and social change was developed and practiced in the 1960s and 1970s, most notably by Augusto Boal (2009) in Brazil, as well as by the “drama-in-education” and “theatre-in-education” movements in the UK (Dalrymple 2006: 203). In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of theatre practitioners, academics and development workers experimented with these ideas, in their efforts to democratise theatre and use it as a tool for the “empowerment” of local people in a Freirean tradition (Nogueira 2002: 104ff; Epskamp 2006: 14ff). Today, the notion of TFD is used as an umbrella term to describe more interactive or participatory developmental theatre practices in general:

Theatre for Development as a planning, educative and even managerial instrument relocates indigenous cultures from the periphery, where remote-control development policies had relegated it, into the very centre of the community, and makes it central to communal planning and decision-making. ... It takes local cultural values and practices as the departure point from which to define what kind of development is needed to improve the life in the community and by what means it should be effected. ... Theatre for Development that focuses on the active participation of the target group may well have a liberating and democratizing effect. (Breitinger 1994: 8)

Despite their obvious methodological and ideological similarities, there is little exchange between PV and TFD. The PV literature contains comparatively little information on the individual dramas enacted within PV workshops (Bery 2003; Lunch & Lunch 2006). The TFD literature, on the other hand, discusses video merely as a medium of documentation and dissemination (Harding 1997; Koch 2008: 108). Despite the parallels, practitioners from both fields seem to be unaware of the anthropological traditions of ethnofictional filmmaking (Rouch 1967; Sjöberg 2008). This lack of knowledge must be viewed in the context of

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<sup>34</sup> While TFD refers to the use of theatre in development projects, “Applied Theatre” can be more broadly defined as “the practice of drama and theatre-based activities outside the formal school curriculum and traditional theatre buildings. It includes a range of theatre and drama-based activities, projects or interventions with a focus on providing awareness and provoking a response to social issues” (Dalrymple 2006: 202).

the more general theoretical and methodological shortcomings apparent in many aspects of the field, some of which have been outlined above.

The assumption of a direct causal connection between participation, “empowerment” and sustainable development is often based on a generalised notion of “empowerment”, and seems outdated in the light of the critique of the underlying concepts of participation (Cooke & Kothari 2004b) and development (Ferguson 2007). Nevertheless, the above discussion suggests that the activities performed and discourses engaged with in participatory film workshops can be both meaningful and beneficial for the participants in various (albeit limited) ways. If undertaken critically and with a carefully defined focus, PV offers an interesting avenue of investigation for both academic and applied research. In my own research, I am most interested in how decision-making power and practical implementation skills may be transferred to the participants during PV processes, how this shift effects the dynamics within the workshop, and the ways in which it impacts on how participants and other local stakeholders relate to both the making of the film and the resulting product. Moreover, I want to determine whether PV can be successfully employed within anthropological research.

### **3.4. Applied Visual Anthropology and Participation**

Projects in *applied visual anthropology* have received increasing interest in recent years, resulting in a number of publications dedicated to explorations within this field.<sup>35</sup> This development can be understood in the light of an ongoing need on the part of anthropologists to find work outside academia, and the parallel tendency for academic research to be financed through third party

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<sup>35</sup> Most significantly the Visual Anthropology Review (VAR) published two special issues with a focus on applied visual anthropology. In 2003, an edition was dedicated to the South African *Steps for the Future* HIV awareness film programme (Levine 2003; Biella et al. 2003; Ginsburg & Abrash 2003; Englehart 2003; Chislett et al. 2003), while the spring edition of 2004 introduced several case studies of applied visual anthropology (Chalfen & Rich 2004; Flores 2004; Jhala 2004; Lovejoy & Steele 2004; Pink 2004b, 2004a; Stadhams 2004). Most of the case studies from the latter edition, along with a few other related studies were republished in 2007 in a book entitled *Visual Interventions. Applied Visual Anthropology* edited by Sarah Pink (2009b).

funding – a “commoditisation” of research that seems to be directly connected to the demand for applied results (see Russell et al. 2008). As applied visual anthropology has not (yet) developed its own coherent theory or methodology, it would not be accurate to refer to it as a new sub-discipline – the field consists rather of a great variety of activities united to the extent that they are “using visual anthropological theory, methodology and practice to achieve applied non-academic ends” (Pink 2006: 87). At the same time, regardless of their intended aims, these projects have the potential to feed back into academia, contributing to theory-building and methodological innovation (Pink 2009a: 25). While applied visual anthropology is not participatory *per se*, many of the case studies emphasise the collaborative dimensions of the work involved (see for example Levine 2009; Flores 2009; Durrington 2009). Since my own work takes place in an applied context, I introduce the field of applied visual anthropology as it could be considered to constitute the methodical and socio-political background of my work.

Pink (2009a) states that applied visual anthropology is usually conducted in cooperation with private, public or NGO partners or commissioners, which may range from multinational corporations to development agencies to indigenous communities. The projects may incorporate a multitude of methods and media, such as text, posters, sound, multimedia and video/film. As opposed to academic anthropology, which is normally more explorative and does not aim to change the informants’ lives directly, applied anthropology “usually takes the form of problem-solving practice ... and aims to bring about some form of change” (Pink 2009a: 11f). These “social interventions”, as Pink terms them, “might range from using visual practice to empower research participants with new levels of self-awareness, promote a specific cause to a target audience, or to provide decision makers in business or policy contexts with ‘evidence’ that will inform their work” (2009a: 11).

Importantly, these projects are in most cases not shaped by anthropologists alone, but together with commissioners, co-researchers from other disciplines, and other stakeholders in the projects (Pink 2004a: 10f). An important point of contestation is the question of ethics: “Each type of project provides a new



context and another set of rights, responsibilities and ethical concerns” (Pink 2009a: 19). With so many different parties involved, she argues, the research is guided not only by the ethical principles of one’s own discipline and one’s “informants”, but also by the standards of all other parties involved, such as commissioners and researchers from outside the discipline of anthropology. Pink portrays the implicit necessity of negotiation and compromise in a rather positive light, as a potentially productive exercise. While acknowledging the validity of her arguments, I would also emphasise that while these negotiations may lead to a binding code of conduct that guarantees respect to and is respected by all the parties involved, there is also the possibility that agreements may not be adhered to by project partners, who might perceive research ethics as relatively unimportant, and unnecessarily or excessively limiting. In such a situation I argue that it is of great importance for researchers to primarily respect their ethical obligations to those people with whom they work, rather than their obligations to sponsors, clients or even co-researchers (AAA 2009). This issue may become especially tangled if there is a commercial interest involved. Rights of access to and use of any images produced as part of the research should therefore be negotiated before the start of the project (Pink 2009a: 18ff).

Another common problem in applied research is that of shorter timeframes compared to more conventional ethnographic fieldwork, often making the ideal of an “exploratory approach to discovering and representing other people’s lives” impossible (Pink 2009a: 15). Pink downplays this practical limitation in applied visual anthropology projects:

Their essential aims are problem solving and social intervention. In this situation there is little point in continuing to define anthropology in terms of its long-term fieldwork method. Instead, we need to see anthropology as a way of understanding and approaching questions, issues and problems. (Pink 2004a: 9)

Drawing on Jean Rouch’s (2003: 44) feedback screenings with his informants, Pink argues that the use of collaborative and participatory methods may compensate for the lack of time available (2009a: 16). Rouch is misinterpreted in this case, however, since his feedback screenings were not intended to generate knowledge more quickly or efficiently, but were a means by which he could

ensure reciprocity and the sharing of anthropology as part of his long-lasting relationships with his protagonists (Rouch 2003: 43f). Pink's positive reframing of the issue of limited time-frames seems particularly problematic when one considers that participatory filmic approaches are usually *more* time-intensive than conventional research and filmmaking methods (see Kindon 2003; Mistry & Berardi 2011).

The concept of applied visual anthropology seems to be a useful framework within which to place the increasing number of research projects conducted in non-academic contexts. I agree with Pink that such projects may also have significant relevance to academic research. However, her dissociation from traditional notions of ethnography appears overhasty, especially when referring to research intended to feed back into academic anthropology, a discipline in which long-term research and an in-depth engagement with participants are still important premises of ethnographic enquiry. During the various projects discussed in this dissertation, it was often impossible to conduct contextualising research, for example on the participants' backgrounds, or on the reception of the films, due to temporal constraints. These are important issues that need to be addressed when discussing the implications of applied research.

### **3.5. Synthesis: Evaluating Participatory and Collaborative Approaches**

The preceding discussion of participatory and collaborative approaches to filmmaking reveals both continuity and discontinuity. Jean Rouch (2003) drew heavily on the work of Robert Flaherty when he developed his shared anthropology. David MacDougall (2003a) referred to Rouch as well as Flaherty when he wrote about participatory cinema. A number of contemporary anthropological filmmakers in turn refer to these founding principles in their own research, as outlined above (Sjöberg 2008; Flores 2009; Durington 2009; Gruber 2010, forthcoming). Furthermore, a whole body of films explicitly or implicitly draws on the participatory work of these filmmakers, underpinned by a strong sense of continuity running through all participatory approaches to ethnographic filmmaking. However, notions of participation and collaboration appear to be used somewhat randomly in much of the relevant literature, with the result that it

is more difficult than it might initially appear to make a coherent comparison of the various filmmakers and their approaches. While anthropologists involved in the development and research of indigenous media have also been informed by ethnographic film (Ginsburg 1995; Flores 2009), there are few direct links between anthropology and participatory video.

In the following, I attempt to summarise the most important aspects of participatory filmmaking, taking a number of salient recurring themes within the literature as markers or guides. Together, these will serve as a preliminary framework for the evaluation of such films.

### **3.5.1. Initiative**

The question of who initiates a film project is commonly raised in the literature. Jean Rouch considered the initiation of new projects by members of audiences that had viewed his previous films to be a central aspect of shared anthropology (Henley 2009: 318; Rouch 2003). Likewise, the “idea that the film’s mandate should clearly come from the subjects themselves and not from the filmmakers” was an important feature of the MacDougalls’ participatory work with Australian Aborigines (Grimshaw 2001: 141). Initiative also includes the important question of the film’s overall theme or topic. A filmmaker working at the request of the protagonists on a film exploring a topic that they have proposed is clearly in a more favourable position than someone who has to convince the participants to accept and take part in the project in the first place. The former situation implies a high degree of motivation and genuine interest on the part of the local participants that can be seen as an expression of agency and an indication of genuine participation. Independent of the actual conditions of inception of a project, initiative may also serve as a marker of authenticity within films; this may be established through diverse filmic means (see for example MacDougall & MacDougall 1980b: 00:29; Young & Olibui 2009).

In indigenous media the initiative may be seen as residing largely with indigenous actors, who have taken up media production in response to increasing political and cultural pressure (Michaels 1986; Ginsburg 1991; Turner

1990). While outsiders, often anthropologists, usually provide initial training and funding, indigenous filmmakers have in most cases quickly appropriated the technology and used it for their own purposes. However, contemporary indigenous media productions are often embedded in international networks constituted by indigenous and non-indigenous media producers, researchers, activists and politicians – as I have outlined in Chapter 3.2.

Participatory video projects are usually initiated by development workers or researchers. In some cases they are imposed on a local situation from the outside without reference to any previous contact; in other cases they may be instigated as a part of ongoing research or on the basis of existing contact with local participants or project partners (Menter et al. 2006; Waite & Conn 2011). Sara Kindon, in a situation that could be considered an example of a more “bottom-up” initiative, integrated PV into her research after the participants of her research “had identified a desire to learn video production and research skills for tribal history and community development purposes” (Kindon 2003: 144). While participatory research and development approaches aim to include the participants as equal partners at all stages of the process (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; FAO 2012), the research question and the methods applied are often formulated by the researchers alone. Moreover, there is a risk that PV or other participatory approaches may be applied in order to distract from more “extractive” research, or to disguise power relations within projects (Cooke & Kothari 2004a). The question of who does and who does not participate obviously determines the resulting product and is closely connected with the issue of initiative. Access to filmmaking technology and expertise can be thought of as a resource, and issues of access can reinforce conflicts and power struggles (Turner 1991; Aufderheide 1995).

### **3.5.2. Participant Involvement**

The filmmaker’s participation (in the lives of his or her protagonists) is the basis of an approach to ethnographic filmmaking, which is construed as an aspect of ethnographic research (MacDougall 2003a; Ruby 2000; Henley 2004). Moreover, ethnographic filmmakers have implemented participation through negotiation of

the film's form and content, or through the interaction between themselves and their protagonists during the shooting (MacDougall 2003a; Rouch 2003). At the same time, the opening sequence of the MacDougalls' (1981) *Wife Amongst Wives*, or Jean Rouch's proclamation of "a camera that ... will automatically pass into the hands of those who, until now, have always been in front of the lens" (Rouch 2003: 46), are but two examples that evoke the ideal of shifting control of the filmmaking (or significant aspects of it) to the protagonists. While none of the filmmakers introduced herein gave up the authorship or practical implementation of their films completely, Flaherty and Rouch assigned responsibility for certain technical aspects, such as sound recording, to locals.

David MacDougall reminds us that the protagonists exercise control over films in often unforeseeable ways that may be beyond the control of the filmmaker or even in opposition to his or her intentions – by their appropriations (1994) or by being physically inscribed in the film (1998). What distinguishes some of Flaherty's (1922) and Rouch's (1959, 1967) work, as well as contemporary ethnofictional filmmaking (Sjöberg 2007) and certain PV projects (Waite & Conn 2011) in this context, is the use of fictional elements. As I have argued, following Sjöberg (2008), fictionalisations constitute a unique filmic space. The possibility of improvisation and play (Rouch 2003) changes the relationship between filmmakers and protagonists. The different parties become a team, working for the same goal, in contrast to the more hierarchical relationship between observers and observed in conventional documentary filmmaking. This enhances the protagonists' agency in these projects, leading to more mutual representations. I would therefore argue that fictionalisations can be also regarded as a participatory method.

Participatory video differs from ethnographic film in that to a great degree the protagonists implement the technical aspects of filming themselves. The participants are trained to operate the camera and sound equipment – sometimes they also learn how to edit the footage. Equally important, the participants make the decisions as to the form and content of their films. Feedback screenings with the wider communities are organised in order to elicit comments, opinions and ideas that can be taken into consideration for further

filming. The process of filmmaking is believed to ensure the participant-filmmakers' ownership of the film and effect "empowerment" (Lunch & Lunch 2006: 10ff). Literally handing over the camera is an integral aspect of PV, with the underlying intention of shifting more control into the hands of the participants and to destabilise stereotyped power relations between observer and observed / researcher and researched (Kindon 2003). At the same time, one could argue that not only do the facilitators still control the technology and the workshops, but that participatory processes are always embedded in discourses and practices of power that work against genuine participation (Kothari 2004; see also Faris 1992).

The notion of participation (in the filmmaking process) has different connotations in indigenous media, since indigenous actors largely implement these projects – with varying degrees of support from outsiders. Local people normally do most of the filming and editing, and, importantly, also control the distribution. While most of the films are usually produced for internal use (Crawford 1995), operating the camera has great symbolic value, which is often knowingly and actively deployed as part of the internal and external politics of these groups (Turner 1992; Flores 2009). Some of these initiatives rely on financial and technical support from government agencies, NGOs and individuals. While some scholars argue that video, as a Western technology, leaves little room for indigenous media producers (Faris 1992) or might even be completely unsuitable for non-Western cultural producers (Weiner 1997), these concerns are counteracted by indigenous and other marginalised peoples' active and self-reliant use of the medium (Ginsburg 2011). Terence Turner's (1991, 1992) detailed descriptions of the ways in which powerful actors monopolise the medium, shift attention to the question of access and exclusion. While I have already raised the issue of access at the outset of a given project, Turner reminds us that both the filmmaking itself and the resulting products may be employed in such a way as to exclude certain individuals or segments in a community (1991: 73) and thereby

reinforce existing power structures; a problem that may also arise within PV contexts (Lunch & Lunch 2006: 59; see also Cooke & Kothari 2004b).<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the production of a film lies the important but largely unexplored field of participatory reception.<sup>37</sup> While control over the footage and the resulting films is a vital aspect of any participatory project, the protagonists or other stakeholders of films may also be included in the distribution and reception of the end product, as practiced in the *Steps for the Future* HIV/AIDS awareness film programme (Levine & Englehart 2003; Levine 2009). While the programme's films are usually directed by professional directors in consultation with NGOs and HIV/AIDS self-help groups (see for example Phiri 2001), screenings moderated by the films' protagonists are an integral aspect of the project. Significantly, their "physical presence before audience members often creates a critical relationship that seems to open up new and unusual opportunities for discussion and potentially for action" (Englehart 2003: 74). The usefulness of moderated screenings is emphasised by Jane Stadler (2003), who argues that the non-didactic and personal approach adopted by the makers of the *Steps* films provides opportunities for identification and engagement, but might also conceivably invite audience interpretations that are in conflict with health-conscious behaviour. The moderated screenings act as a means by which protagonists are enabled to guide audience interpretations and discussions of these films, and must therefore be acknowledged as a participatory element of the production.

Participation in the filmmaking process can take many forms, from the initial idea, to the conceptualisation, to the complex decision-making that determines the form and content of a film, not to mention the practical aspects of operating a

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<sup>36</sup> The possibility of reinforcing existing power relations or privileging certain individuals is certainly also present in ethnographic filmmaking. However, the anthropologist/filmmaker, as an ideally impartial outsider, is probably less inclined to intentionally influence the group's existing power structure than members of that community.

<sup>37</sup> Going back to the work of Walter Benjamin (2008) and Marshal McLuhan (2010), the notion of *participatory reception* is commonly used in art and theatre contexts to demarcate active from more passive audience engagements (The Chicago School of Media Theory 2007).

camera or sound-recorder or playing the part of a protagonist. While these projects are embedded in discourses and practices of power, the question of exactly how these decisions are made and who it is that makes them is of great importance. A comparison between the three genres discussed here suggests that shifting technical aspects of the production with all its implications is a significant act that differentiates PV and indigenous media from ethnographic film.

### **3.5.3. Mutuality and Benefits**

Reciprocity plays an important role in all anthropological filmmaking, since filmmakers and protagonists must negotiate the conditions of their cooperation – whether openly or implicitly. In simplified terms, they have to find an agreement which promises to be equally rewarding for both parties. While filmmakers or researchers most likely generate an income and/or enhance their professional career through engaging in such projects, the protagonists or participants are often expected to invest their time out of pure interest or goodwill. It could be argued that the protagonists are compensated through immaterial rewards such as public recognition, the acquisition of new knowledge, or through taking part in an interesting and rewarding experience. In addition they might also receive payments or other forms of material compensation. In participatory filmmaking, which aims to create a more equal relationship between the parties involved, the question of how each party benefits becomes particularly important. As Carlos Flores rightly argues: “The successes and failures of such joint ventures ... have to do with their ability to articulate meaningful processes and outcomes for their participants” (2004: 40).

While the relationship between filmmakers and their protagonists is a recurring theme throughout the literature, there is lack of concrete information about how exactly the parties involved benefit. Most filmmakers discussed here share a general understanding that a long-term and in-depth relationship with the protagonists is a vital prerequisite – be it in the form of shared anthropology (Rouch 2003), participation (MacDougall 2003a) or activism (Turner 1992). Reciprocity is then construed differently: Jean Rouch declared a mutual



relationship as the basis of his shared anthropology, although he defined the relationship with his protagonists rather one-sidedly and paternalistically, with only for his closest collaborators enjoying concrete benefits (Henley 2009: 321). In opposition to such vague agreements, ethnographic filmmakers have increasingly developed binding rules of engagement, in the attempt to ensure that their films are equally useful and meaningful for both them and their protagonists (Elder 1995; see also Flores 2009). David MacDougall went a step beyond this, and postulated the ideal of “a filmmaker putting himself at the disposal of his subjects” (2003a: 128), an ideal that was partially, though only briefly, realised through the MacDougalls’ Australian films (MacDougall 1994).

“Service providers”: this is another way in which anthropologists working with indigenous communities may sometimes present themselves. Permission to conduct research is granted by the indigenous participants in exchange for their technical, financial or political support (Turner 1992; Flores 2009). More generally, indigenous filmmaking is depicted as a cultural and political resource for the respective communities, and thus as a beneficial pursuit (Ginsburg 1991; Turner 1991; Flores 2009). As for participatory video, the question of benefit depends very much on the perspective adopted: argued from “within the orthodoxy”, participation leads to “empowerment” and social change, through which the participants automatically benefit (White 2003d). As the term “beneficiaries”, used to refer to the participants of such projects in development-jargon, implies, their participation in research and development projects is implicitly assumed to be wholly advantageous for them. If one does not align oneself with such an outlook, it becomes more difficult to justify ones involvement. Researchers have discussed training (Menter et al. 2006; Gruber 2010) or advocacy (Lunch & Lunch 2006) as being potentially useful to the participants, while Wait and Conn (2011) indicate how the medium may serve as a means of resistance.

Individuals are largely neglected in all the above descriptions, even though they are affected most directly by the filmmaking. Notable exceptions to this tendency to downplay the individual are Terence Turner (1991), who describes the political motivations that prompt certain individuals to engage with the medium, and

David MacDougall (1994), who relates how the filming of *Familiar Places* (MacDougall & MacDougall 1980a) was used by their protagonists as a means of reclaiming ancestral land – the film becoming an integral aspect of the process it documents. More concrete information about personal motivations and individual agreements between filmmakers and their protagonists is entirely absent from the literature. I think that this void is problematic for any approach to filmmaking that implicitly or explicitly claims to serve the interests of protagonists and other stakeholders in the project. It is therefore of great importance that filmmakers, facilitators and researchers address the question of how each party involved benefits from these cooperations, on an individual as well as a general level. At best, the resulting products are equally meaningful and useful to all parties involved (Elder 1995) or else the projects yield multiple results so that each of the parties benefits in a way that is appropriate to their particular needs (Flores 2004).

#### **3.5.4. Summary**

The first part of this dissertation was dedicated to painting a broad picture of the tradition of participatory filmmaking within ethnographic filmmaking and neighbouring disciplines. From Robert Flaherty's *Nanook* up to the present day, filmmakers have continually sought new ways to shift aspects of their work to their protagonists – by deeply engaging in their daily lives, by considering their advice, through the use of feedback loops, through fictionalisations, and by delegating certain technical aspects to, or devising the form and content of the film together with, their protagonists. Motivated by ethical concerns and the desire to enhance<sup>38</sup> their work, these filmmakers have striven to render both filmmaking and ethnographic research a more mutual enterprise. However, the protagonists' input into these projects has always been limited, and the anthropological filmmakers have continued to retain authorship of their work. As the control over the process has remained largely in the hands of the anthropologist-filmmakers, *participatory* seems a more appropriate adjective to

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<sup>38</sup> As David MacDougall writes: "By giving them [the protagonists] access to the film, he [the filmmaker] makes possible the *corrections, additions, and illuminations* that only their response to the material can illicit" (MacDougall 2003a: 125; emphasis added).

describe these approaches than *collaborative*, which, after Ruby, implies a more equal and involved form of *cooperation* (see Ruby 1991).

Despite the numerous parallels, there are a number of methodological and epistemological differences between the three fields discussed. Explorative in nature, ethnographic films “seek to interpret one society for another” (MacDougall 1992: 96). Informed by anthropological theory and based on ethnographic fieldwork, the genre usually (but not exclusively) represents an outsider’s view of the culture or group under consideration (see for example MacDougall 2003a; Ruby 2000). Indigenous film and other “subject-generated media” (Ruby 2000), are self-representations primarily aimed at members of the same society or culture (see Crawford 1995; Ginsburg 1995). These films are predicative and codifying rather than exploratory, often contributing to the negotiation of cultural identity (Ruby 2000: 196).<sup>39</sup> While this is also the case for PV, these films differ greatly in their scope. Significantly, each of these fields has its own set of participatory methods, only some of which overlap. The adoption of alternative methods might therefore change the scope or epistemological underpinnings of the work. While it is certainly useful to initiate greater exchange between the different fields, it is also necessary to carefully select and adapt one’s methods and underlying theories to the projects’ aims and overall context, as some methods might be useful within one genre, yet turn out to be inapplicable when transplanted into another context.

Explicitly or implicitly, the reviewed literature suggest that films can be implemented with different degrees of participation, depending on the methods applied. For example Jean Rouch, conceived of shared anthropology as consisting of distinct stages, from rather “passive” feedback screenings to more “active” performative interactions between filmmakers and protagonists (Henley 2009: 317ff). Even more pronounced is David MacDougall’s presentation of the diverse aspects of participatory cinema in a hierarchical order: from “entering actively into the world of his subjects” to “giving them access to the film” (2003a:

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<sup>39</sup> My thanks go to Peter Ian Crawford for his comments on this issue (personal communication 2.5.2012).

125) to a “process of collaboration – the filmmaker combining the skills and sensibilities of his subjects with his own” (MacDougall 2003a: 126). The highest degree of participation is then seen in “films in which participation occurs in the very conception and recognizes common goals” and ultimately in the instance of “a filmmaker putting himself at the disposal of his subjects” (MacDougall 2003a: 128). The idea of differing degrees of participation is even more evident in some of the general literature on participation. Arnstein (2007), for example, evokes the metaphor of a “ladder of citizen participation” with rungs representing degrees of inclusion in political decision-making processes. At the same time it is difficult to assess the degree of participation evident in a film, and especially to compare degrees of participation in films belonging to different genres, simply by juxtaposing or “adding up” the participatory methods applied. The following questions can serve as a guideline for both the evaluation of existing projects and the implementation of new ones.

### **Initiative and focus**

- Which institutional, social and political factors govern the film project?
- Who initiates the project?
- Who is included in the project in which ways? Who is left out and why?
- How are the participants selected?
- What are the intentions and motivations of the different participants?
- Who decides on the film topic? How is this decision achieved?

### **Participant input**

- How much time is invested in the project and its various stages?
- How exactly do the participants contribute to the filmmaking?
- By letting the filmmaker participate in their lives?
- Through acting/interacting/improvising during the shooting?
- By giving advice and consent?
- By making suggestions regarding form, content, focus, aim?
- Through (ethno)fictional approaches?
- By providing feedback?

- By (co-)directing the film (e.g. choosing topics, locations, protagonists, conducting interviews)?
- By operating the camera, sound equipment or other technical devices?
- By editing the film or making editorial decisions?
- Through organising the distribution?
- Through mediating the reception?
- How are the responsibilities of decision-making and practical implementation distributed between the parties involved?
- How are the decisions regarding the film made?
- Are certain actors excluded or marginalised by the resulting film?
- Which other stakeholders are affected by the project?
- Who is credited for which tasks?

### **Benefits**

- What are the (perceived) advantages to the different parties involved?
- On an individual and various societal levels
- In financial, political, social, cultural or emotional terms
- Within different time-frames
- How and when do negotiations about the benefits take place?
- Who is “empowered” to do what, and in what ways is this achieved?
- Who has access to the raw material and the resulting films?
- How do the various participants use the resulting products?
- What are potential disadvantages for the stakeholders?

As these questions highlight, filmmaking is intrinsically bound up with a continual process of decision-making, from choices about fundamental issues such as a film’s topic or the composition of the production team, to myriad decisions, both major and minor, that must be made throughout all phases of a production. Of special importance is the editing process, during which the footage is creatively processed and may acquire completely new meanings. The significance of decision-making is highlighted by Jay Ruby’s definition of collaborative filmmaking, when he writes: “Involvement in the decision-making process must

occur at all significant junctures” (Ruby 1991: 56). In this context, I must emphasise that it is only possible to discuss and make decisions about some aspects of filmmaking in the context of an open forum; certain other decisions must be made either individually, or else mutually but intuitively – through interaction during the shooting, for example, by the camera operator and his or her protagonists (Rouch 2003).

In the subsequent discussion, I will use the following (working) definitions and terms:

- **Participatory filmmaking** includes the protagonists or other project stakeholders (referred to as **participants**) in the decision-making process that shapes the film and/or its practical implementation – in a deeper and more comprehensive sense than simply taking their advice or seeking consent.
- The term **collaborative filmmaking** or **collaboration** will only be applied to refer to projects or relationships within productions in which the parties work together on a more or less equal level (Ruby 1991).
- I will henceforth refer to all the individuals actually implementing the film (including workshop facilitators and participants) as **members of the production team**.
- Anyone who is more generally affected by the filmmaking will be termed a **stakeholder** in the project.

#### 4. Previous Experiences with Participatory Filmmaking

When I was attending one of my first ethnographic film festivals, a number of other students and I had a conversation with David MacDougall. We were talking about our films and how we had struggled to make them. MacDougall told us – in his somewhat shy and reluctant way – that he was also still learning how to make films. That filmmaking is a constant process of learning, which really never ends. (Field diary 7.2.2008)

In the light of the diverse concepts and approaches outlined in the previous chapter, I will now discuss my own work within the framework elaborated. The film *Liparu Lyetu* is the most recent participatory film project of a series of films that were realised during my professional development and formation. Following David MacDougall's idea of a career-long learning process, in order to fully understand a film it is necessary to see it in the context of the filmmaker's previous films. In this chapter, I therefore provide an account of my previous work, with an emphasis on applied filmmaking. I will describe and analyse three films that contributed to the formation of my approach of participatory ethnographic filmmaking.<sup>40</sup>

As I have never received formal training in participatory filmmaking, my approach is based on a university education in anthropology and my practical filmmaking experiences. During my studies of social and cultural anthropology at the University of Hamburg in Germany, I employed filmmaking as an element of my research into homelessness (Gruber 2007). The resulting documentary, *sleeping rough* (Gruber & Becker 2002), depicts the everyday lives of a group of homeless people living and congregating in the city centre of Hamburg. Co-director Jochen Becker and I were influenced by the work of Jean Rouch (Rouch & Morin 1961) and the MacDougalls (MacDougall & MacDougall 1981), which we perceived as representing complementary poles on a continuum between observation and reflexive interaction. After this first experience with filming, I continued my studies in the "Visual Anthropology Programme" at Goldsmith College, London, in 2002. My graduation film, *Cultivating Death* (Gruber 2003),

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<sup>40</sup> This chapter is based on some of my previous work (Gruber 2011, forthcoming).

depicts the activities of various protagonists at a large Victorian cemetery in West London. I realised that the bereaved had chosen the public space of the cemetery to engage in ongoing relationships with the dead. For them, mourning was a performative act (Francis et al. 2001), the filming of which allowed the performers exposure to a wider audience. The film presents me as a researcher, and gives cemetery users a platform from which to express themselves. Both films served as ethnographic methods of research and representation (Ruby 2000; Henley 2000). This approach changed, however, when I started making films aimed at non-Western audiences while working as a self-employed filmmaker.

#### **4.1. Wiza Wetu – Our Forest**

My first commissioned film, *Wiza Wetu – Our Forest* (Pröpper & Gruber 2007), was produced in collaboration with my former fellow student Michael Pröpper for *BIOTA Southern Africa* (BIOTA), a multidisciplinary research project investigating changes in biodiversity in Southern Africa.<sup>41</sup> Pröpper, who had at that time been doing anthropological research in the Kavango Region of Northern Namibia for several years, realised that illegal logging was one of the main threats to the environment in this area (Pröpper 2009). The trees are usually felled with axes and sawn into planks with hand saws on the spot, producing timber for local and regional consumption. In the Kavango Region the forest resources belong to the public. At the same time, only a relatively small number of villagers and some local entrepreneurs generate an individual income from these informal activities. The majority of the population loses out – through the decline of natural resources and the general ecological destruction. In order to raise awareness about the ecological consequences of these activities and to inform the local people about alternative modes of income, Pröpper wanted to produce a film. He approached me and together we developed and produced the 53-minute film *Wiza Wetu*. During the research and filmmaking we were based in Rundu, the capital of the Kavango Region, from March to June 2007.

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<sup>41</sup> BIOTA Southern Africa was part of the BIOTA Africa research cluster conducting research in different parts of Africa. Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the project ran from 2000 until 2010.



The film's intended audience consisted of the villagers living in and originating from the forest areas of the Kavango Region, since most of the people involved in the local timber business were members of these communities. We produced the film in the local language, Rukwangali, with subtitles in English. As we did not speak the language well, we required the assistance of interpreters throughout the production. In order to make the film as meaningful and interesting as possible, we decided to include our interpreters and research assistants in the filmmaking more profoundly. We hired Raphael Sinkumba from Rundu, who had already worked with Pröpper as an interpreter and field assistant. During the process of filmmaking, I trained him as a camera and sound assistant, and he became an integral part of the production team, offering many suggestions regarding both the content and style of the film. The second local crewmember was Robert Mukuya, a Namibian employee of the BIOTA project. He was our most important link to the rural communities, and played the film's main character. As a *para-ecologist*<sup>42</sup> he had been working for the BIOTA project for approximately five years prior to the filmmaking and was therefore an experienced and well-known community facilitator in the area. In the film, he plays himself: as a community researcher investigating the different aspects of deforestation, he guides the viewers through the film.

*Wiza Wetu's* overall narrative is that of a road movie: Robert Mukuya visits various places that play important roles in the processing and trade of illegally harvested wood, in both the Kavango Region and in the Namibian capital of Windhoek. He talks to diverse actors involved in the timber business: a forester, a timber dealer, a representative of the administration, a development worker, and various villagers. The film shows key activities, such as the felling and processing of trees, and suggests possible alternative ways to generate incomes from forest resources. At the end of the film, a number of traditional authorities

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<sup>42</sup> "Para-ecologists" were members of local communities employed and trained by the project to work as translators, research assistants and facilitators at different BIOTA research sites in Namibia and South Africa. The para-ecologist programme was one of the project's main strategies for capacity development and participatory research (Araya et al. 2009; Schmiedel et al. 2010).

and local officials make political statements, calling for sustainable use of the forest. Throughout the film, Mukuya provides comments and explains his perspective as a community researcher, directly addressing the viewers. Despite the film's intention to raise awareness, we approached the filmmaking in parallel with processes of research and analysis, much as in ethnographic filmmaking. The film makes use of observational material, as well as various forms of conversations and interviews.

Especially interesting in the context of this dissertation is a re-enacted sequence depicting the felling and processing of a tree (Pröpper & Gruber 2007: 01:45-11:47). It was important to the production team to show these events in order to give an impression of the strenuous work involved. At the same time, we could not have filmed these activities using a realist documentary approach, since harvesting trees is against the law and might have led to the protagonists' prosecution. After discussing the issue with members of Ncumcara Community Forest,<sup>43</sup> where we did most of our filming, we decided to introduce a fictional framework and re-enact the logging, as inspired by Jean Rouch (see Sjöberg 2008; Henley 2009: 355). Three young men who regularly worked in the informal timber business were willing to demonstrate the activities involved if we could get permission from the Department of Forestry in Rundu. We explained our plan to the forestry officers and were issued a permit to fell one tree for the film.

Together with the protagonists and a few foresters we drove to the designated location in the forest and selected a suitable tree.<sup>44</sup> A few days later, the production team and protagonists returned to the site with the necessary equipment. Since felling and sawing up a single tree took almost two whole days, we camped at the site for one night. On the first day, an acquaintance of Mukuya and Sinkumba joined us to play the role of the urban entrepreneur in charge of

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<sup>43</sup> Community Forests are part of Namibia's Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) policy aimed at shifting the control over natural resources to actors at the community level. For an overview see Fabricius et al. (2004).

<sup>44</sup> We were allocated a tree, which looked healthy but was in fact damaged and would have died sooner or later. The timber produced by our loggers was donated to the Ncumcara Community Forest.

the deal. Before the actual filming the protagonists explained to us how such ventures usually took place, and we decided together which aspects were important to shoot. Filming was then done from a distance, often using a tripod, allowing a great deal of space for the protagonists to perform their activities. Following Rouch's idea of ethnofictional filming, our protagonists performed their activities without any directions and with few interruptions, allowing a largely documentary style of shooting (Rouch 2003: 186; see also Henley 2009: 260ff). Additionally, the actors improvised a more consciously performed introductory sequence (01:45-4:48) as well as a discussion in which they talked about the problems and dangers related to their work (09:42-10:58). These conversations are crucial to the film, since they contain contextualising information and establish the protagonists as nuanced personalities representing opposing perspectives on this complex situation. The re-enactments thus combine *descriptive improvisations*, during which our protagonists provide an illustration of their work, and *expressive improvisations* in which they talk about the emotions connected to their situation (see Sjöberg 2009: 6ff). Even though it was clear to everyone that our protagonists usually practiced their trade clandestinely, the official permission and the fictional framework of our filming gave them the security and confidence to demonstrate their activities without fear of being sanctioned. The mode of interaction with my protagonists that had been a central concern within my filmmaking thus far changed radically during the filming of *Wiza Wetu*. The fictional framework altered the form of the relationship much in the same way as described by Johannes Sjöberg (2008): the production team and the protagonists were united by the common aim of finding the best way to demonstrate their activities. This seemed to result in a more mutual relationship between filmmakers and protagonists. I therefore continued to experiment with this approach in my later films.

The aim of *Wiza Wetu* was to initiate a critical discussion that, ideally, would contribute to a fairer distribution of forest-related income and a more sustainable management of the forest. Screenings throughout the Kavango Region were therefore an important aspect of the project. Rural communities were our main target group. The members of our production team agreed that it would be advisable to frame the film with further information and to initiate a discussion,

especially in rural areas where many people have little or no experience with film or television and might be poorly informed about policy issues. Instead of simply screening the film, we therefore decided to organise facilitated village screenings. As part of his ongoing employment with BIOTA, Robert Mukuya visited numerous places in the Kavango, equipped with a power generator and video projector, and screened the film, answered questions and initiated discussion amongst the audience members. Unfortunately, the reception of the film was not analysed in any structured way, but according to Mukuya, the film screenings triggered strong audience reactions (Mukuya; personal communication March 13<sup>th</sup> 2008). As suggested by Englehart (2003), the presence of the protagonists and/or filmmakers seems to offer an immediate point of contact with the audience.

The production and distribution of *Wiza Wetu* gave me my first direct insights into a more participatory approach to filmmaking. The members of our German-Namibian production team made most of the decisions about the content and structure of the film on their own; undoubtedly the outcome of the project would have been substantially different if we had included other actors more systematically. Even within our team, the decision-making power was not evenly distributed, due to the differences in the individual members' technical knowledge and control over resources. This bias towards the German side shifted somewhat during the course of the project as Mukuya and Sinkumba became increasingly active and involved. Even though further research on the impact of such films is necessary, our experience supports the understanding that locally produced films may contribute to public debate about important social issues (Levine 2003; Levine & Englehart 2003). In the context of participation, the introduction of a fictional framework seemed an interesting alternative to more conventional documentary approaches, as it shifted the relationship between filmmakers and protagonists, resulting in compelling ethnographic material (Sjöberg 2008). Significantly, the film took on an important role in the funding project's self-presentation. At the time of writing, BIOTA has distributed more than three thousand DVD copies of the film to researchers, journalists, and policymakers. Furthermore it has been broadcast twice by the Namibian

Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) as part of their national TV programme, and presented in various academic contexts.

#### **4.2. Mema Eparu – Water is Life**

The production of *Wiza Wetu* led to another commissioned film called *Mema Eparu – Water is Life* (Gruber & Sinkumba 2008), produced in Rundu between January and April 2008. The Luxembourgish development agency Lux-Development had supported the municipality of Rundu for years – with, among other projects, that of formalising the city's informal settlements, characterised by makeshift buildings and a lack of basic infrastructure such as roads, water, electricity, etc. (Lux-Development 2011). The project included the expansion and improvement of the water supply in the city's two largest informal settlements; Kehemu, with approximately 12,000 inhabitants, and Sauyemwa, with approximately 10,000 inhabitants (see SDFN 2009: 62ff). An awareness campaign was intended to promote the use of tap water rather than water from the Kavango River, which many inhabitants of these areas consumed. Paolo Cervino, then regional representative of Lux-Development in Namibia, decided to use a film for this campaign and wrote a film treatment, which was implemented by a Namibian production company in 2006. Cervino was unsatisfied, however, because the outcome did not meet his technical expectations, and the resulting

films were never published.<sup>45</sup> When we met by chance in Rundu, Cervino commissioned me to produce a film based on the same treatment.

The production of *Mema Eparu* was interesting from the perspective of participatory filmmaking since it was governed by a number of diverse stakeholders. My most important counterparts working on behalf of the commissioner of the film were James Sauramba, an experienced Zimbabwean development worker and at that time manager of Lux-Development in Rundu, and Caroline Schmit, a Luxembourgish hydraulic engineer, who was working as a junior consultant with Lux-Development. While Sauramba was responsible for supervising and authorising my work, Schmit assisted me on a daily basis through her expertise and contacts. In addition, I hired my previous co-worker, Raphael Sinkumba, as an interpreter and assistant for the film production. We had developed a professional relationship based on similar ideas about filmmaking, and had established a highly effective working routine in the technical aspects of film-production during our previous cooperation. Sinkumba was responsible for establishing contacts and interviewing the protagonists while I operated the camera. The editing was undertaken mutually. I operated the editing programme, arranging the clips following continuity editing conventions. Sinkumba simultaneously interpreted the dialogues, explained their cultural contexts, offered locally specific possibilities for interpretation, and advised me

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<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately I only received copies of the two films produced by the Windhoek-based *Ngen* film production company after the completion of *Mema Eparu*, and never had the chance to discuss the issue with Cervino or with the director, Benton Ngen. The 34 minute-long films *Our Water, Our Environment* (Ngen 2006a) and *Our Water, Our Lives* (Ngen 2006b) were produced in English, and would therefore have been incomprehensible to many informal dwellers. The films are equipped with an explanatory voice-over and are largely based on interviews, recordings of political meetings and observational footage. Both films also contain scenes from humorous plays performed by a youth group during a public meeting organised by Lux-Development (Ngen 2006a: 07:54-9:48; Ngen 2006b: 17:33-20:20), suggesting the popularity of theatre with development agencies (Epskamp 2006) as well as with local audiences. The technical problems referred to by Cervino consist of shaky images, constant zooming, rough editing and asynchronicities. These films are aesthetically idiosyncratic, with continuous background music and fancy transitions. It would be interesting – though beyond the scope of this work – to compare these films with my own work based on the same film treatment.

about how different sentences could be rearranged in order to maintain a meaningful continuity. During the production of *Mema Eparu*, Sinkumba assumed increasing responsibility, so that we ended up making most of the directorial and editorial decisions together. Sinkumba thus became a co-director rather than an assistant, a fact that is acknowledged in the film's credits.

In addition to Sauramba and Schmit, the commissioning body Lux-Development included other stakeholders in the decision-making process leading to the film's creation. Benjamin Makayi, the city's public relations officer, was granted considerable control, since the Municipality of Rundu was officially the recipient of our services. Makayi was mainly concerned with representing his employer, the City of Rundu (and its water system) as a modern and functioning entity that did its best to deliver a reliable service to its citizens. He assumed that it was the ignorance of Rundu's inhabitants that was the main reason for the water-related problems, and downplayed evident structural factors, such as the poor water quality, its relatively high cost, and tremendous water loss due to leaking pipes. Lux-Development also introduced us to a number of community representatives from our target areas, Sauyemwa and Kehemu. These were politically involved people who had already acted as spokespersons for their communities on other occasions, and were therefore well acquainted with development issues in general, and the Lux-Development programme in particular. While these community members gave us important information about the water users' situation and helped us establish further contacts in the areas they represented, they were not formally part of the film's decision-making process. Sinkumba and I perceived the absence of community members from the regular meetings with our commissioners as potentially problematic, and decided to include them in the filmmaking process in other ways.

During an initial meeting, the commissioners of the film insisted that it should be based firmly on Paolo Cervino's treatment, which was very detailed, and included a rigid structure and pre-scripted messages. Following this treatment, the film was supposed to inform the public about different water-related issues such as health, the technical process of treating and distributing the water, and the loss of water through leakages and theft. Cervino wanted some

“motivational” statements by authorities such as local headmen, church leaders and representatives of the municipality and the police, to appear in the film. The overall goal was to raise awareness and contribute to behavioural change amongst the local population through information and “guidance”. From Sinkumba’s and my own perspective, such statements (for example, “stealing water is a sin!”) were rather intimidating. We found that the views of water-consumers were almost absent from the film’s outline. We therefore decided to take their perceptions as the starting point of our research, and to include representatives of the intended target group – the inhabitants of Rundu’s informal settlements – in the filmmaking process. We began our research by interviewing the residents of Sauyemwa and Kehemu about their practices and concerns regarding the supply of tap water. Many households had never been connected to the water network in the first place, and others had been disconnected after they had failed to pay their water bills (see also Namibian 2010). While everybody we asked knew perfectly well that it was unhealthy to drink untreated water from the river, our informants’ incomes were often too low and insecure to allow them to buy water. It appeared to us that the main problem was not related to lack of awareness, but to low and insecure incomes.

The resulting film was shaped by the complexities of the situation, including the various stakeholders with their differing intentions and perspectives. Lux-Development insisted that the film be kept rather informatory and explanatory in style. We therefore included interviews with a medical practitioner (Gruber & Sinkumba 2008: 27:37-28:40) and the Kavango Region’s (04:54-06:18) health inspector, explaining the risks connected with the consumption of untreated water. We also included sequences explaining the processes involved in the production and distribution of tap water (10:15-12:12), as well as covering the work of the town’s technical department, dealing with burst pipes and illegal connections (12:12-16:54). Makayi, as already mentioned, was most concerned with how the film conveyed the town’s public image. He favoured statements by political leaders and other authorities, while he rejected some of the water users’ critical accounts. His efforts culminated in a carefully staged self-presentation in which he explained various ways in which the people could communicate with the municipality (17:32-19:30). During this speech, he presented himself in a



smart suit and a golden tie, and gave us precise directions on how to film him. The resulting sequence can be seen as a construction representing the municipality's deliberately maintained self-image as a modern and well-functioning water supplier.

Sinkumba and I, whose allegiance was predominantly to the water-users and their concerns, wanted to contextualise the authoritative, explanatory parts of the film with a clear statement about their economic situation as a main driver of the problem. In order to highlight the difficult situation many families were facing, we filmed a man carrying a heavy water drum over a long distance from the Kavango River to his homestead as the film's opening sequence (Gruber & Sinkumba 2008: 00:00-03:57). In a voiceover, the man explains very forcefully that many households in his area rely on river water due to unemployment and poverty, despite the common knowledge of the health problems that might result. For another sequence, we filmed a number of statements by informal settlers describing the ways in which they obtained water and the related problems, making it clear that almost every household was struggling to get water in some way or another (06:42-10:02). From our previous experiences in the Kavango, we knew that people tended to enjoy re-enactments, and we therefore convinced the film's commissioners to use these as a main element of the film. The community members we approached were happy to volunteer as protagonists, and since many people had been complaining about the difficulties in establishing contact with the municipality, we jointly decided to adopt this issue as the general topic. In the first re-enactment, a child discovers a leaking water pipe and reports it to her parents, initiating a dispute between them (19:34-22:40). While the husband wants to go to the leak in order to collect the water for their own consumption, the woman accuses him of stealing the water, not only from the municipality but also from the entire community. She scolds him in front of the camera and forbids him from collecting any water while she goes away to report the leak to the town's technical department. This improvised conversation is not only a moral discussion addressing individual and collective ownership and responsibility, but also a very ironic and amusing questioning of established gender roles and relations. In the second re-enactment, a boy and a girl report a leaking water tap to their neighbour, who is a local community spokesperson

(22:44-25:06). When the neighbour follows the children in order to take a look at the problem, they all end up caught in an explosion of water that shoots out of the tap. While the protagonists present themselves as proud and responsible citizens, this sequence can also be interpreted as an ironic critique of the run-down water system, implicitly challenging the city's self-presentation as delivered by Benjamin Makayi. As compared to the re-enactments in *Wiza Wetu*, these sequences rely much more on dialogues incorporating humour and irony as central elements. The sketches were improvised by the protagonists after a short discussion, and shot in single takes.

*Mema Eparu* was screened roughly 120 times over a period of 10 months, mostly in Kehemu and Sauyemwa, but also in other informal settlements of Rundu. Based on our positive experiences with presenting moderated screenings of *Wiza Wetu*, I proposed to Lux-Development that they hire the film's co-director, Raphael Sinkumba, to organise and moderate the screenings. While he did not appear in the film himself, the viewers were well aware that he was one of the directors, and posed their questions to him accordingly. Through repeatedly presenting the film to the public, Sinkumba further appropriated it as his own. Due to its complex distribution of decision-making power, technical expertise, and resources, involving a number of local stakeholders, it could be argued that *Mema Eparu*, was more collaborative than *Wiza Wetu* (see Ruby 1991; Pink 2004a). However, the risk of neglecting the weaker actors within such an arena is extremely high. In *Mema Eparu*, water consumers from the informal settlements were largely absent from the production, and were only involved in the filmmaking process at all through the intervention of Sinkumba and myself. My role shifted further away from that of a "classical" anthropologist filmmaker, who asks for advice and consent (Ruby 1991) but ultimately makes most of the decisions alone, to that of a mediator between the various parties involved in the making of the film.

#### **4.3. Bridging the Gap – Para-Ecologists in Action**

The 20-minute-long film *Bridging the Gap – Para-Ecologists in Action* (Schmiedel et al. 2009) was the outcome of a PV workshop held for local BIOTA members in

Nieuwoudtville in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa over the course of three weeks in April 2009. The film, which introduces the para-ecologist programme, was made by a group of twelve para-ecologists, both male and female, from Namibia and South Africa, amongst them Robert Mukuya, whom I knew from our previous cooperation during the production of *Wiza Wetu*. The workshop involved teaching the participants practical filmmaking skills that they could then use in the project, as well as providing them with qualifications for future employment. More importantly, the process of conceiving and making the film was intended to strengthen their self-awareness, to open up new perspectives on the project, and to increase their work-related motivation. The film offered the participants an opportunity to (re)define their roles within the project and within broader social contexts.

Ute Schmiedel, the coordinator of the para-ecologist programme, initiated the workshop as part of the annual training that we jointly conceptualised, organised, and moderated. Throughout the whole course of the workshop, Schmiedel and I were assisted by Namibian BIOTA member and former para-ecologist Vilho Snake Mtuleni. Due to his professional position, his age and his educational background, he acted as an intermediary between the participants and us. As the para-ecologists, though all accustomed to operating digital still cameras and laptop computers, had no previous filmmaking experience, we began the workshop with a brief introduction to documentary filmmaking, followed by practical training in shooting, sound recording, and interview techniques. Conceptual discussions based on different methods drawn from *Participatory Rural Appraisal* (PRA) and PV, such as group discussions, brainstorming, scoring, ranking, mapping, and the creation of storyboards and presentations ran in parallel with the practical training, and were central elements of the workshop (see for example Chambers 1994; Lunch & Lunch 2006). The participants decided that the main purpose of the film would be to inform other researchers and NGOs about the para-ecologist programme. Another aim was to motivate the youth in the underprivileged communities that the para-ecologists had come from to get interested and involved in seeking further training that might help them to find jobs. The participants also wanted to create a film that they could use to present themselves and their work to colleagues, friends, family, and

potential future employers. It was important to the participants to produce a film that was technically and aesthetically satisfying to them – an affirmation of the importance of the end product of PV processes (see Menter et al. 2006).

The group decided to begin the film with a personal introduction by each participant, filmed and edited in a *vox-pop*<sup>46</sup> style, to provide an idea of the group's cultural and personal diversity (Schmiedel et al. 2009: 00:00-01:55). As they wanted their day-to-day work to be the film's main theme, the participants re-enacted three typical work situations to serve as the central part of the film. During the shooting, the participants swapped roles and responsibilities for each scene, so that everyone was able to experience working as director, camera-operator, and actor at least once. One of the re-enactments was played exclusively by the participants, whereas the other two sequences included outside actors, such as a goat farmer and a group of school children, all of whom volunteered to be in the film. The end of the film contains a sequence on the participants' training (14:45-17:35) and a final statement from each participant about his or her hopes and plans for the future (17:38-19:35). All the sequences were specially arranged for the film, but were shot in a documentary style, without rehearsals or retakes. While the participants were heavily involved in the process of filming, we decided not to attempt to teach them to use the rather complex editing software, due to time constraints. I edited the film in close cooperation with Snake Mtuleni, following the participants' directions and feedback.

The film turned out to be an extremely positive portrait of the para-ecologist programme – despite the participants' various dissatisfactions and problems. The statements about their futures seem over-optimistic in light of the approaching end of their current employment and a rather difficult job situation throughout Southern Africa. At first I found this outcome irritating because I had hoped to provide the para-ecologists with a platform to speak about their job-related problems. Later, I realised that it would have been inappropriate for them

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<sup>46</sup> From Latin "vox populi" (voice of the people). This is an interview format commonly used in TV in which different people reply to the same question.

to be openly critical about their work situation in a film that was funded and organised by their employer. Furthermore, they had explicitly decided to use the film to introduce themselves to other researchers and potential employers. The participants had therefore chosen to construct a positive and even idealised image of their role within BIOTA and society at large. While I had certain expectations about how the participants might use the film as a way of speaking out and communicating their problems, they had chosen to use it for a different purpose.<sup>47</sup> In light of this, when assessing the performances in *Bridging the Gap* it is certainly useful to consider the participants' reproduction of project-compliant norms and values within processes of normalization, as proposed by Uma Kothari (2004). On the other hand, the use of irony and exaggeration can be interpreted as a way of undermining and resisting the dominant discourse (Waite & Conn 2011). Moreover, the decision-making processes involved in making the film, along with the end product, also demonstrate how such films are often appropriated and used by the participants in unanticipated ways (MacDougall 1994) and how the expectations of facilitators and participants may collide (Menter et al. 2006).

While the overall project restricted the production both directly and indirectly, the making of *Bridging the Gap* was founded on a high level of participation, in the conceiving of the film as well as in the fact that most of the responsibility for its technical production was handed over to the participants. I have no concrete information about the film's role in the participants' efforts to find new employment after the end of BIOTA in 2010, but the para-ecologists went on to screen the film in their home communities, and distributed DVDs to their colleagues, employers, family members and friends, from whom they received positive feedback. The training in practical filmmaking skills was perceived as a useful qualification to support their activities within BIOTA, and declared as a

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<sup>47</sup> This situation, in which the participants chose to construct a positive self-presentation while the facilitator was hoping for a more political film, was paralleled by Peter Anton Zoettl's (2012) experiences working with members a marginalised community at Lisbon. While Zoettl depicts his participants' decision to challenge their neighbourhood's negative public image as a conscious step that potentially served to foster pride and self esteem, he highlights the tendency of such positive images to conceal and thereby reinforce oppression.

form of capacity-building. Moreover, the task of conceiving, planning and implementing the film within a period of just three weeks was a complex and demanding process that certainly contributed to the participants' professional and personal development. Finally, the energy and involvement that everybody invested in the project made it an exceptional experience for all parties involved.

#### **4.4. Summary: Preliminary Insights**

The aim of this chapter is to give an impression of how my filmmaking prior to the production of *Liparu Lyetu* contributed to the development of my participatory methods and approaches. I have therefore described and analysed the production of three commissioned films. As I outlined in Chapter 3.5, the underlying aims and intentions of films must be considered when assessing participant input. Of the three films discussed here, *Wiza Wetu* and *Mema Eparu* were intended to communicate certain issues to local audiences. They were authored primarily by outsiders making use of participatory elements for various reasons: out of necessity (due to language barriers); to enhance the filmmaking (making the films more interesting for locals) or for ethical and/or political reasons (to include marginalised stakeholders). Participation, in these circumstances, can be viewed as a means rather than an end (see Cleaver 1999). *Bridging the Gap* was the outcome of a PV workshop intended to enable the participants to make the film largely by themselves. Transferring the conception and aspects of the practical filmmaking to the participants was thus the project's primary purpose. In the following, I summarise the most important results of these experiences, applying and enhancing the descriptive framework I developed in Chapter 3.5.

##### **4.4.1. Initiative**

The films discussed here were clearly not initiated by the participants or other local stakeholders but by outsiders – based on their own specific aims and intentions. Michael Pröpper wanted to use the techniques of ethnographic filmmaking in order to raise awareness among the local population, and also to broaden his anthropological knowledge of the issue. Paolo Cervino wanted to

use film for the communication of development messages using a top-down approach. Ute Schmiedel was interested in PV as a method of training and capacity development for community researchers. My commissioners' interest in the medium of film was paired, however, with a limited knowledge of the practicalities of filmmaking. I therefore had to support them in devising project proposals necessary for allocating the films' funding. My personal aim was to work and experiment with different methods and approaches in contexts that were new to me, and thereby to investigate the possibilities of filmmaking as a tool for research and social change. Moreover, it was a way to generate an income.

Initiated by outsiders, the films' approaches and topics were pre-defined by institutional settings and/or certain discourses, with only very limited control over the finer points left the participants. The films' commissioners also controlled access to the filmmaking, with varying degrees of input from my side. Michael Pröpper included our Namibian co-workers from the outset during the production of *Wiza Wetu*. The production of *Mema Eparu* was influenced by its commissioners and their municipal counterparts. As described above, I saw part of my task as being that of counterbalancing their choices by introducing representatives of the film's intended target audiences into the production. In the case of *Bridging the Gap*, participation in the PV workshop was both granted and specified by the commissioners, as all para-ecologists employed by BIOTA were invited to take part in the training. In addition to those people directly involved in the films' production, "access to the film" (MacDougall 2003a) was gained in all cases in a manner common in more conventional ethnographic filmmaking: during our research we met individuals and organisations we perceived as important for our narrative; if they were willing to contribute, we included them as interviewees or protagonists.<sup>48</sup>

It is not surprising that the filmmaking was initiated from the outside, since potential participants and beneficiaries in research and development contexts are – still – generally unaware that the possibility exists for them to engage in

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<sup>48</sup> See David MacDougall (1998: 45) on how film protagonists may be "chosen" by the filmmaker.

such activities. Nevertheless, this extrinsically initiated approach is a constraint for participatory filmmaking, since many important decisions are inevitably made before the actual research and filming commences. If the aim of the project is to represent local perspectives and concerns rather than those of the commissioners and filmmakers, locals should be included in the creative process as early as possible.

#### **4.4.2. Participant Involvement**

In the case of *Wiza Wetu*, the production team consisted of two anthropologists – Michael Pröpper, with research experience in the Kavango area, and myself, with ethnographic filmmaking experience – and two Namibian research assistants, interpreters and facilitators: Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba. These Namibian co-workers influenced the decision-making process leading to the film more directly by making comments and alternative suggestions, and through their input during the filmmaking; for example by establishing contacts, conducting interviews, and (in the case of Mukuya) acting as a protagonist. On the technical level, I operated the camera as well as the editing computer, while either Pröpper or Sinkumba operated the sound equipment. Even though our Namibian co-workers were an integral part of the team, without whose input the film could not have been realised, it must be acknowledged that Pröpper and I dominated the production conceptually as well as practically. Moreover, the filmmaking was constrained by a certain degree of control exercised by the commissioning body.

In *Mema Eparu*, the core production team consisted of only two persons, Sinkumba and myself. We conceived and executed the film mutually, with a certain division of labour. While I was in charge of shooting and editing as well as the overall production, Sinkumba was largely responsible for communicating with our protagonists before, during and after the filming. This constituted a significant change in approach compared to that employed when filming *Wiza Wetu*, where Sinkumba's role was more that of an interpreter, as Pröpper and I insisted on immediate simultaneous translations during conversations and interviews. In *Mema Eparu*, Sinkumba conducted the interviews largely without my interference



once we had agreed upon the general theme. The exact meaning of the dialogue, then, only became clear to me during the editing. Sinkumba also took over the sound recording and occasionally operated the camera. Eventually, he organised and moderated the screenings for *Lux-Development* and thereby established ownership of the film beyond its actual production (Levine & Englehart 2003). Sinkumba increasingly assumed responsibility and agency, which made our relationship more equal and genuinely collaborative. This change was made possible through his growing expertise and motivation, but also relied upon my willingness to give up control.

The production of *Mema Eparu* was characterised by intensive negotiations with commissioners and municipal representatives. As we did not succeed in finding agreement on an overarching approach or narrative, the resulting film is a heterogonous mix of disparate filmic styles and approaches, such as interviews, political statements, staged self-presentations, re-enactments and observational sequences, all held together by an off-camera commentary. Due to the relatively large degree of control exercised by local stakeholders, one could attribute a high level of participation to the project. It is however not sufficient to assess participation based exclusively on the number of stakeholders involved or the control they exercise. If powerful agents aim to dominate the filmmaking, it is difficult to prevent existing power relations from being reproduced (see for example Turner 1991; Lunch & Lunch 2006). In such cases, purported participation may in fact “conceal and reinforce oppressions and injustices” rather than deferring agency to the weaker participants (Cooke & Kothari 2004a: 13). It is therefore necessary to become aware of such hierarchies and consider the agendas of all the stakeholders involved. It might be necessary to counterbalance the powerful actors by introducing and/or boosting the positions of marginalised stakeholders in the production and/or by highlighting their perspectives in the resulting film, which may be achieved through the editing. In this context, it is important to consider that communities of marginalised stakeholders are in themselves heterogeneous entities with their own hierarchies and differing agendas.

The aim of *Bridging the Gap* was to train and facilitate the participants by providing a PV workshop. Transferring as many aspects of the production as possible to the participants was therefore not only our method but also the underlying aim of the project. While Ute Schmiedel and I initiated the project, conducted the training, and moderated the conception of the film in cooperation with Snake Mtuleni, the participants made directorial decisions and technically implemented the film largely by themselves. Early in the production they decided to use the film for their own purposes and accordingly devised a carefully orchestrated self-presentation. The editing of the film was realised by Mtuleni and myself, with constant direction and feedback from the participants. Enabling the participants to technically implement the film constituted a shift compared to the previous films. The participants considered the camera training and shooting to be the most important aspect of the workshop, and perceived the resulting film as their own work, displaying a high level of identification and ownership. The workshop leading to *Liparu Lyetu* was based heavily on the experience of making this film. A number of themes emerge from the discussion of the participant input of these films:

1. I see the cooperation with local assistants such as Robert Mukuya, Raphael Sinkumba and Snake Mtuleni as a participatory element within the context of this work. In particular, Sinkumba's increasing involvement over the course of two film productions constituted a significant shift of decision-making power and agency, culminating in the co-authorship of *Mema Eparu*. Crucially, this transition required willingness on both sides: on the one hand, Sinkumba needed to assume responsibility and implement his new tasks; on the other, while this may sound paternalistic, I had to be prepared to relinquish some control.
2. My experience in *Mema Eparu* suggests that the inclusion of stakeholders must be carefully staged – in both the process and the resulting film – in order to avoid reinforcing existing hierarchies.
3. My experiences in the production of *Bridging the Gap* suggests that transferring the decision-making process and practical aspects of the production to the participants has a definite impact on their identification with the resulting product.

Beyond the conceptualization and practical implementation of the films, protagonists influence the outcome by being represented in the films themselves. In the films discussed here, re-enactments inspired by the work of Jean Rouch (1967, 1959) proved to be an especially powerful method by which to enhance the protagonists' position within the production process and the resulting products. Even though none of the films were based entirely on a fictional framework, most of the sequences were arranged especially for the films, and re-enacted. The various modes and functions of improvised acting proposed by Johannes Sjöberg (Sjöberg 2008, 2009) can be found in this work. In some sequences the protagonists demonstrated their usual working routines rather straightforwardly, much as in realist documentary filmmaking. Other scenes are more obviously and consciously performed, making use of irony or exaggeration in a self-conscious way. While such performances superficially deal with mundane activities they can also be understood as negotiations of complex issues. The fictional framework creates a unique filmic space within which these issues can be discussed, and, in some cases, within which dominant discourses subverted.

As Perle Møhl (2011) points out, the introduction of film as an ethnographic research method heightens awareness of the fieldwork encounter, leading to more equal relationships between anthropologists and participants than those generally formed through conventional research. I suggest that the introduction of a fictional framework further amplifies this heightened attention. Both allowing and demanding creativity and conscious performance, the fictional framework also confers increased responsibility and agency on the protagonists, and so leads to a more equal balance of power in the relationship between filmmakers and protagonists. This then has an impact on the way the protagonists are represented in the resulting film. For local viewers, re-enactments (like locally produced films more generally) offer enhanced potential for identification, as they depict familiar faces and places as well as employing a familiar language and referring to a common cultural background with its own distinctive storytelling traditions. Re-enactments playfully combine information with entertainment in non-didactic ways (Gruber 2008; see also Levine 2003; Stadler 2003). Their

uncertain status – between fiction and documentary, reality and play – confuses the audience, helping to make the viewing of these sequences an enjoyable experience (see Loizos 1993). The ambiguity may also allow the viewers to distance themselves to an extent and draw their own conclusions, in contrast to documentary narratives with their implicit claim to be representing “reality”. Significantly, within the context of participatory filmmaking, re-enactments and other fictional approaches should be considered intrinsically participatory in nature.

#### **4.4.3. Mutuality and Benefits**

I have argued that the question of how the different parties benefit from their joint activities is of great relevance to participatory filmmaking. All three films discussed above were commissioned works, and the individuals directly involved in the production received salaries. I shall therefore address the issues of benefit and reciprocity, first of all in the context of work. The production team of *Wiza Wetu* consisted of four persons, all of whom received payment from the BIOTA project. While Pröpper and Mukuya were permanently employed by BIOTA, Sinkumba was paid a daily wage, and I received a fixed amount for the finished product. During the production of *Bridging the Gap*, the situation was similar: Ute Schmiedel and the para-ecologists were project employees, receiving a monthly salary, while I was paid a fixed sum as a freelancer. *Mema Eparu*, on the other hand, was commissioned by the development agency Lux-Development, which paid me a fixed amount for the production of the film, whereas I paid Sinkumba a daily wage as a freelancer.

Mukuya and Sinkumba were paid rather well by Namibian standards, but poorly in comparison with the German project members.<sup>49</sup> While I perceived our differing incomes as justifiable in the context of our respective qualifications and responsibilities, as well as the purchasing power they represented in our home countries, debates over money were a permanent fixture: in the context of a latent dissatisfaction with their salary, my Namibian co-workers' discussions circled around daily allowances, weekend surcharges and bonus payments. During the two films I produced for BIOTA, my co-directors and commissioners, Michael Pröpper and Ute Schmiedel, were responsible for the payment of participants. The situation was different during the production of *Mema Eparu*, when I had to pay Sinkumba directly out of my own budget. I felt uncomfortable as an employer – a role implying a hierarchical relationship that did not match my ideas of equal cooperation – and considered sharing my income with Sinkumba equally, but then my own salary would have been too little to support myself in Germany.

Besides monetary income, the members of the production teams benefited from the filmmaking professionally. In academic contexts, research experience, as well as the resulting films<sup>50</sup> and written publications that resulted from the filmmaking process, may enhance professional reputation and lead to the securing of future positions. Likewise, these activities contributed to the training and education of my non-academic co-workers (see also Menter et al. 2006; Gruber 2010). Both Mukuya and Sinkumba noticeably improved their knowledge and skills over the years we worked together, contributing to their further

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<sup>49</sup> During the production of *Mema Eparu*, I paid Sinkumba a daily salary of 100 Namibian Dollars (NAM) and an additional bonus adding up to 7,000 NAM (approximately 700 Euro) over a seven week period. I received a total of 7,500 Euro for the production of the film, which left me with roughly 4,500 Euro, before taxes, as payment for more than three months' work, (including the preparation and post-production in Germany). During the production of *Liparu Lyetu*, I paid Sinkumba 200 NAM per day plus bonus payments, which added up to 9,200 NAM (approximately 900 Euro) for six weeks' work. During this production I earned about 1,250 Euro per month after taxes as a research fellow.

<sup>50</sup> However, many anthropological filmmakers complain that films are not considered as having the same academic "weight" as written publications, for example when applying for academic positions.

employment. While Mukuya found permanent employment, first with BIOTA and later TFO, Sinkumba has done freelance work for both of these projects as well as for other NGOs and government projects. After the production of *Mema Eparu*, he was hired by Lux-Development in order to organise and moderate film-screenings in the informal areas of Rundu – an assignment that was a direct consequence of his participation in the filmmaking. Both Mukuya and Sinkumba use copies of their films to present themselves to colleagues or potential employers, which is also the case for the other participants involved in *Bridging the Gap*. Moreover, their participation in research and filmmaking contributed to their reputation within their communities (see Turner 1992; Flores 2009). Sinkumba and Mukuya thus benefitted professionally, economically and socially from these projects. In contrast to our co-workers who were in permanent employment, Sinkumba and I were in many ways in a similarly precarious position: as freelancers, our incomes were erratic and unpredictable. However, my Namibian co-workers' living standards and future prospects were much lower than my own due to the unequal economic contexts of our different home countries and social backgrounds.

As for our protagonists, we paid the young men who re-enacted the felling and sawing up of a tree in *Wiza Wetu* the same wage that they would have been accustomed to receiving as loggers. All the other protagonists volunteered, but were usually given a small present in the form of money, food or photographs. It is difficult to assess whether and in what ways the protagonists otherwise benefited from our activities. I am certain that they enjoyed the immediate experience of filming. Moreover, their presence in the films increased the public attention they received for a period of time. This might have had a positive impact on their position within (local) society – a possible consequence especially significant for the decision-makers and bureaucrats who were interviewed as experts in the films. On a community level, anthropologists and filmmakers have argued that participatory filmmaking confers diverse benefits in political, social and cultural spheres (Turner 1991; MacDougall 1994; Elder 1995; White 2003c; Ginsburg 2011). As financial limitations did not allow an assessment of the local consumption of these films I am unable to make any claims regarding such advantages. Nonetheless, these films represent the

perspectives of people who would otherwise be underrepresented or even invisible, not only in the respective projects: the loggers and other users of forest resources in *Wiza Wetu*, the para-ecologists in *Bridging the Gap*, and the inhabitants of informal settlements in *Mema Eparu*. Their statements can be seen as messages contesting the dominant discourse within these projects and therefore as a form of resistance (Kesby 2005) or as political acts (see Kidd & Rodriguez 2010: 16). While it is difficult to establish a direct link between such films and social change, anthropologist Peter Anton Zoettl (2012), contends that increased public visibility of “non-dominant sectors of society ... may bring people back from oblivion and into the public existence” (Zoettl 2012: 8). Based on the PV workshops he conducted in Brazil and Portugal, and drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Zoettl sees the opportunity for marginalised groups to shape their own public image as a shift in symbolic power (Bourdieu 1994).

#### **4.4.4. Limitations of Applied Research**

The films described above can all be situated in the field of applied visual anthropology as they were aimed at (social) change rather than being explorative (see Pink 2009a). *Mema Eparu* was commissioned for a development project, and can therefore be clearly situated outside academia. While *Wiza Wetu* and *Bridging the Gap* were made for a project conducting scientific research, both films were charged with specific tasks, such as raising awareness, facilitating research communication and training, which were not directly related to BIOTA’s basic research aims. Significantly, all three projects were subject to constraints regarding the content and style of the respective film. During the production of *Wiza Wetu*, I not only had to negotiate and compromise with my co-director and commissioner Michael Pröpper, but also to work under a certain degree of censorship, as the BIOTA project management asked us, before the production, not to touch upon politically sensitive issues, in order to avoid incurring negative consequences for the overall project. Consequently Pröpper and I decided not to address the subjects of mismanagement and corruption in our film, even though we perceived them to be important factors contributing to the problem of deforestation. In the case of *Mema Eparu*, the restrictions went much further and much deeper, since all decisions regarding the film had to be made in

consultation with a number of powerful actors. On the one hand, we had to respect the terms of reference predefined by the commissioning body. On the other hand, the municipality's representatives firmly controlled the film's form and content. The third film discussed here, *Bridging the Gap*, was less politically controversial, and therefore less prone to censorship or influence by parties not involved in the immediate filmmaking situation. However, as in the two other projects, dominant discourses, in this case those governing work ethics and environmental issues, guided and confined the work.

Certain compromises and constraints are of course necessary in any kind of filmmaking. However, in comparison with my anthropological work (Gruber & Becker 2002; Gruber 2003), in which I had to negotiate almost exclusively with my protagonists, the applied context expanded the sphere of influence to a much wider group of people. Some of these stakeholders exercised a degree of control that challenged my understanding of independent research and filmmaking. At the same time, I perceived a mismatch between the agendas of these powerful agents and the interests of the less powerful stakeholders. Being most concerned about the needs and rights of the marginalised actors, my ultimate goal became that of representing their perspectives and interests as strongly as possible. This shifted my role from that of participant observer to advocate and mediator. As already stated, I am cautious of Sarah Pink's rather positive framing of applied research as "collaboration ... with clients, co-researchers from other disciplines, and other interested parties ... [requiring] flexibility to, and appreciation of, other people's agendas and needs" (Pink 2004a: 10). My experience suggests that the risk of usurpation and censorship is much higher in applied projects and in huge research clusters involving numerous researchers from other disciplines, posing a serious threat to the ethics of anthropological research and filmmaking (AAA 2009). While Pink (2009a) rightly points to the differing ethical standards held by various parties as a possible source of conflict, I propose broadening this concern to include the different and even opposing ideas and expectations that stakeholders have about the general aims and



outcomes of the research.<sup>51</sup> Another problem connected with applied research was that of the time constraints under which the films discussed here were produced, which made intensive relationships with participants and protagonists, as well as conducting contextualising research, impossible. Not only did this impede the filmmaking process itself, it also made it difficult to meet the standards and expectations of academic research.

#### **4.4.5. Evaluation**

While they were initiated by commissioners from outside the local context, and despite various limitations posed by the institutional and political settings, the films discussed here included protagonists and other stakeholders in the filmmaking in various ways. Due to the diversity of stakeholders involved in the production of the films, the mediation of differing agendas and perspectives became a main aspect of my work. The following factors contributed most significantly to increasing the participatory nature of filmmaking in these applied contexts:

1. Shifting increasing responsibility onto local co-workers.
2. Carefully managing the agendas and perspectives of stakeholders, with a conscious bias towards the less powerful actors.
3. Experimenting with alternative cinematic forms such as re-enactments.
4. Moderating, though not controlling, the conception of the film, and training the participants to practically implement their ideas.
5. Including local members of the production team in the distribution and reception of films.

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<sup>51</sup> This view is supported by my positive experience in applied visual anthropology with two anthropologists. Commissioned by Carolin Kollwe and co-directed by Michaela Schäuble, I produced the interview film *Faces of Aging* (Gruber & Schäuble 2009) for an exhibition on aging at the Grassi Ethnographic Museums of Leipzig. Our common anthropological background, with the same epistemological assumptions and ethical standards, clearly facilitated our cooperation as compared with projects I have undertaken that involved close collaboration with non-anthropologists.

At the same time the productions of these films revealed a number of difficulties and shortcomings that should be considered in future projects:

1. Managing time constraints and the influences of commissioners and other stakeholders.
2. Including participants in the film's conception at an early stage of the production.
3. Negotiating remuneration and other benefits for participants and protagonists.
4. Drawing more systematically on local storytelling and media formats.

## **5. Liparu Lyetu: Film Context and Content**

The previous chapters illustrated the evolution of my approach to participatory ethnographic filmmaking, developed through my own explorations into combining and refining various methods and approaches stemming from ethnographic filmmaking and PV. This approach forms the methodological basis of *Liparu Lyetu*, the main focus of this dissertation. In this chapter, I describe the institutional and local settings of the film's production and the content of *Liparu Lyetu* itself, in order to contextualise the process of production. I start with an introduction to *The Future Okavango* project, which constitutes the institutional framework of the filmmaking. This chapter also documents the rather lengthy application process leading to my participation in the project. This is an important aspect of the dissertation, as it illustrates how the nature of the service I provided for TFO was shaped by different factors, such as the funding organisation's ideas about participation, my project colleagues' concepts of the role of film, and my own ideas about filmmaking, as well as by my position in the overall project.

In the second part of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the Mashare Area of northern Namibia, with a particular focus on its natural resources. Though it is not the aim of this dissertation to give an ethnographic account of the Mashare Area, but rather to discuss a method of filmmaking applicable in a variety of cultural or social settings, it is important to outline the social, political, and economic aspects of the environment that influenced the filmmaking, in order to make the film more comprehensible. In the third part of this chapter, I go on to describe the film's content, in order to make the subsequent chapter, which details the actual production of the film, accessible to readers who do not have the opportunity to view the film itself.

### **5.1. The Future Okavango Research Project**

The interdisciplinary research project "The Future Okavango" (TFO) is dedicated to support a sustainable landuse and resource management in the Okavango Basin of the countries Angola, Botswana and Namibia with scientific knowledge. The region under investigation, a system of woodland savannas, floodplains and

extended wetlands is of crucial global importance for biological diversity. Simultaneously it is threatened by rapid transformation through climate change, population growth and anthropogenic over-utilization of natural resources. Such threats can amplify land- and water conflicts. (TFO 2012b)

The Future Okavango research project is a research cluster that includes natural and social scientists from numerous university departments, research institutes and NGOs in Germany, Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Portugal, Belgium and Brazil. Over 130 researchers from diverse disciplines such as microbiology, hydrology, soil science, botany, geography, remote sensing, anthropology and economics are listed on the project website. The project's aim is to develop sustainable strategies of land- and resource management, based on a comprehensive scientific analysis of the entire ecosystem of the Okavango Basin. The main aspects of the research are concerned with the valuation of goods and services provided by the environment – so-called “ecosystem functions” (ESF) and “ecosystem services” (ESS)<sup>52</sup> – as well as the development of scenarios that project the consequences of different land-use strategies into the future (TFO 2009). In its aim to generate a comprehensive overview of the Okavango basin, TFO chose four research areas, together representing the full range of landscape types within the Okavango catchment region. These are Chitembo and Caiundo, at the river's upper and central catchment in Angola; Mashare, in Namibia; and Seronga, situated just above the Okavango Delta in Botswana. In order to dovetail the activities of different disciplines and to enable comparative research, the project defined core research sites in each of these areas, covering the various forms of land use: “The focussed cooperation of all disciplines on jointly selected study sites is a necessary prerequisite for the

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<sup>52</sup> These concepts are defined by the project (TFO 2009: 8, footnote 2) as follows: “Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include *provisioning services* such as food, water, timber, and fiber; *regulating services* that affect climate, floods, disease, wastes, and water quality; *cultural services* that provide recreational, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits; and *supporting services* such as soil formation, photosynthesis, and nutrient cycling” (MEA 2005: v). *Ecosystem functions*, on the other hand, “are intermediate products in that they are necessary to the production of services but are not services themselves” (Boyd & Banzhaf 2007: 619).

comparative analysis of different inter- and trans-disciplinary results” (TFO 2009: 19).

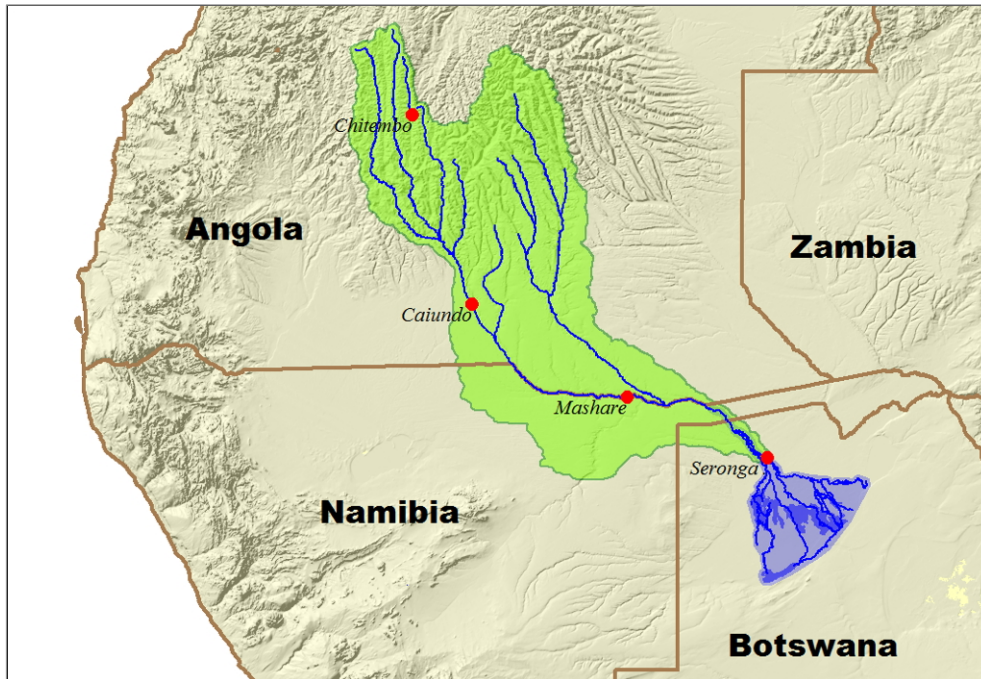


Figure 1: TFO research sites © TFO

The third-party project began in September 2010 and is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) with over 7.5 million Euros over a period of five years (TFO 2012a). Many TFO members had already conducted research within the BIOTA project referred to above, and formed an application consortium in order to continue their cooperation when the BMBF announced its new funding measure, “Sustainable Land Management”, in October 2008. The funding measure is part of the “Research for Sustainable Development” (FONA) framework programme, one of the Ministry’s major funding programmes, with a budget of two billion Euros from 2010 until 2015. FONA’s overall aim is to address “global challenges” such as climate change; biodiversity loss; water, resource and energy shortages, and soil degradation by balancing two opposing aims:

If the quality of life shall be maintained in industrialized countries and be improved in developing and newly industrialized countries, we must find ways to achieve apparently opposed goals: it is imperative to secure prosperity, to enable development and a future that is worth living as well as to reduce the

consumption of natural resources and the emission of ecologically harmful substances. (BMBF 2009: 2)

The discourse of sustainability and development clearly positions the FONA research within a developmentalist framework. This is reinforced by the BMBF's aim "to strengthen cooperation between science and industry", as formulated in the project call (BMBF 2008). Two parallel developments seem particularly influential in the context of the application-oriented research approach specified in the BMBF's project call: on the one hand, a "dramatic increase in social concern for 'the environment'" since the 1960s, contributing to a corresponding increase in such research (Russell et al. 2008: 463); on the other, the emergence of a "knowledge economy" in which knowledge and innovation are treated as central elements of economic growth and international competitiveness. This has changed the way in which research is perceived in society and the manner in which governments provide funding. Research is no longer perceived solely as a means of knowledge production and dissemination, but is also expected to generate some additional value (see Russell et al. 2008).

A *transdisciplinary research approach* was an important requirement for acceptance, predetermined by the funding body (BMBF 2008). Developed as a means by which to investigate the complex and interconnected character of environmental problems, *transdisciplinary* research, as the name suggests, transcends disciplinary boundaries; this is distinct from *multidisciplinary* research, in which scholars from diverse disciplines work together while still maintaining their respective disciplinary approaches and perspectives, and *interdisciplinary* research, in which the overlapping or intersecting areas of interest of several different disciplines are investigated (Russell et al. 2008: 460f). Following Wickson et al (2006), transdisciplinarity is based on three elements:

1. It is grounded in the understanding that there are problems "in the real world that are complex, multidimensional and not confined by the boundaries of a single disciplinary framework" and that it is both possible

and desirable to find solutions to these problems (Wickson et al. 2006: 1048).

2. It is based on evolving methodologies continually shaped according to the specific situation during the research process. This may require the invention of new and unique methodologies, beyond current epistemological boundaries.
3. Transdisciplinary research is collaborative: this collaboration involves not only other researchers but, even more importantly, external stakeholders. Its focus on stakeholder involvement situates transdisciplinary research in the field of participatory research (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995) and more generally in the discourse of participation and development as outlined above.

Transdisciplinarity plays an important role in TFO, and is manifest in the very structure of the project, which is subdivided into 10 subprojects, each defined by its specific research focus and/or the tasks it is to perform to promote the accomplishment of the overall project goals. Among these are two overarching subprojects; on the one hand SPC, coordinating the activities of the entire cluster, and on the other hand SP10, responsible for “stakeholder involvement” as well as “governing trans-disciplinarity and capacity development” (TFO 2012c). The project’s self-presentation summarises the arrangement:

Subproject SP10 supports the interaction between the scientific project team and non-scientific stakeholders. The main objective of SP10 is to design and facilitate a **participatory research process** which links science to management as well as decision- and policy-making. (TFO 2012c: emphasis added)

Organised by Thomas Falk, an economist at the University of Marburg, SP10 is subdivided into three *tasks*. In task 1, Falk himself coordinates the establishment of a framework for the inclusion of stakeholders at all stages of the research. Task 3 organises the employment of research assistants from local land-user communities at the various research sites. Organised by botanist Ute Schmiedel of the University of Hamburg, the establishment of a para-ecologist programme, which had already been an important aspect of the precursing BIOTA project, is seen as a participatory element as well as an important means of capacity-

development for TFO (Schmiedel et al. 2010). Task 2, for which I am responsible, is the production of participatory films, described on the project website as follows:

The objective of Task 2 is to use films as a means to **involve stakeholders into the project and to communicate project activities to different audiences**. Enabling representatives of stakeholders such as **local resource-users, traditional authorities, and NGOs** to conceptualize, direct and shoot films about their concerns will initiate **discussions amongst scientific and non-scientific stakeholders**. The process of filmmaking thus constitutes a platform for the negotiation of different and even conflicting perspectives. The outcome will be a series of films related to ESF&S that are analyzed by our team and thereby help to understand the socio-ecological system of the basin. (TFO 2012c: emphasis added)

The approach to filmmaking summarised in this self-presentation deviates from my original intentions, and was the result of lengthy negotiations during the project's application process. When I first contacted the former BIOTA members in order to initiate my participation, I indicated my interest in applying film as an ethnographic research method contributing to the project's basic research. However, my co-applicants saw additional potential for film in two other areas. The first of these was to serve as a medium for the communication of research activities and results; the production of *Wiza Wetu* for BIOTA was often referred to with reference to this suggestion. While that film was originally intended to raise awareness amongst local audiences, it was also heavily used for project communication purposes (Gruber 2010, forthcoming). In the context of PV workshops he organised in Portugal and Brazil, Peter Anton Zoettl (2012: 7) suggests that the use of films produced in cooperation with local communities for the funding bodies' PR purposes might be an important factor for the increase of such interventions:

The visual spin-off of these workshops may be one of the reasons for this development [the increased popularity of PV], since the funders usually reserve themselves the right to exploit those images produced in conjunction with funded projects. Images, within this context, are not only understood potentially to be able to improve the negative 'image' of marginalized target groups, they are also



considered valuable for the public relations of the funding bodies and project administrators. (Zoettl 2012: 7)

The other potential angle proposed by my colleagues was to regard film as an innovative participatory method facilitating stakeholder inclusion, as postulated by transdisciplinary and participatory research. My positioning within SP10, which was itself a service provider to the overall project, rather than being involved with conducting basic research, reinforced this service aspect of my work. Budget cuts during the application further influenced the parameters of my filmmaking. While the use of “filmmaking ... as an ethnographic method that generates data about stakeholders’ views and perceptions” was, formally, still part of my task (TFO 2009: 318) and guided my filmmaking, this aspect became increasingly difficult to realise within the given timeframe and considering my position within the project.

*The Future Okavango* project proposal was based on a broad stakeholder definition with an emphasis on organisations operating at local, regional, national, and global levels (see for example TFO 2009: 8, 15ff). It was therefore an important task of the sub-project to establish contacts with existing stakeholder organisations and organise regular meetings with representatives of local, regional and (trans)national actors such as traditional authorities, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and university departments (TFO 2009: 228ff). The participation of rural communities was intended to be implemented through a variety of approaches such as participatory filmmaking, the para-ecologist programme, and *Forums for Integrated Resource Management* (FIRMs).<sup>53</sup> When we discussed the filmmaking, Falk made it clear that he expected a wide range of stakeholders to be included. I considered it important to highlight the perspectives of marginalised actors within the research

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<sup>53</sup> Based on regular meetings with community members and relevant stakeholders, FIRMs are intended to enable the participants to identify development needs, as well as to formulate and implement a strategy addressing these issues. The FIRMs established for TFO through its Namibian partner organisation, the *Desert Research Foundation of Namibia* (DRFN), are not focused exclusively on development but also aimed at enhancing interaction between researchers and community members by developing research plans, as well as testing and implementing their findings (DRFN 2012; see also DRFN 2003; Manning & Seely 2005).

arena, a position that had been reinforced through my previous experiences of filmmaking with powerful stakeholders. However, the question of whom to include in the filmmaking, and the way in which to do so, was not settled at this point of the application process, and tacitly postponed until the implementation of the project.

The inclusion of stakeholders as stipulated in the funding body's call became the guiding principle of my work. It was agreed that one film would be produced in each of the three study countries: Angola, Namibia and Botswana. While these should, broadly speaking, be thematically related to the project's overall theme – the natural environment – the participants would narrow the focus down according to their particular priorities. Three aims of the project were especially relevant:

1. To feed the views and perceptions of the stakeholders back into the project.
2. To facilitate the implementation of TFO by building trust and local support.
3. To communicate the activities of the project to a diverse range of audiences, both within the project area and in the broader field of audiences targeted by the project's communication strategy.

Counter to the idea of negotiating project outcomes and products with the participants, as suggested by participatory and collaborative filmmaking (see Elder 1995; Flores 2009), the institutional framework predetermined the project development in many ways. Most significantly, the films' stipulated use for communication purposes implied that they should be produced to a technical standard that would require the provision of a rather high degree of guidance to the participants on the part of the facilitators. This was compounded by my original idea to apply filmmaking as an ethnographic research method, which I conceived as a filmic exploration of phenomena with a focus on an observational approach (see Henley 2004).

## **5.2. The Site of Research and Filmmaking at Mashare**

The project's pre-defined Mashare research site is situated some 50 km east of the regional capital, Rundu, on the South bank of the Kavango River, which forms the boarder between Namibia and Angola. It stretches approximately 14km south of the river, with its northern boundary extending some 19km along the river's length. 518 households were situated in the research area in 2011 (Domptail et al. 2012). An average of six persons per household adds up to a total population of approximately 3100 residents,<sup>54</sup> mainly distributed among four villages – Tjeje, Mashare, Muroro and Mupapama (named in order from West to East) – and a number of smaller settlements. While Tyeje, Mashare and Mupapama are each presided over by a head(wo)man, Muroro falls under the jurisdiction of Mashare. The homesteads are scattered among a patchwork of plots used for subsistence cultivation along the gravel road running parallel to the river between Rundu and Divundu. Close to the river, the area is densely inhabited, with up to 100 people per square kilometre, whereas the population density drops sharply with increasing distance from the river (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 79).<sup>55</sup> In the woodlands further south a relatively sparse population is distributed among a number of small hamlets and cattle posts. With 15,600 residents in an area of 9,175 square kilometres, the Mashare Constituency, where the research site is located, is the least densely populated constituency in the Kavango Region (NPC 2012: 43).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Quantitative data are taken from a socio-economic baseline survey conducted by TFO in 2011. They are based on a random sample of 291 households and 1770 individuals. Fieldwork in Mashare was conducted by Stephanie Domptail and Benjamin Kowalski of the University of Giessen (SP08). Data management and descriptive statistics were provided by Laura Große and Nadege Azebaze of the University of Marburg (SP07).

<sup>55</sup> Roughly two thirds of the population of the Kavango Region live within only five kilometres of the river (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 79).

<sup>56</sup> The Kavango Region is politically and administratively divided into nine constituencies.

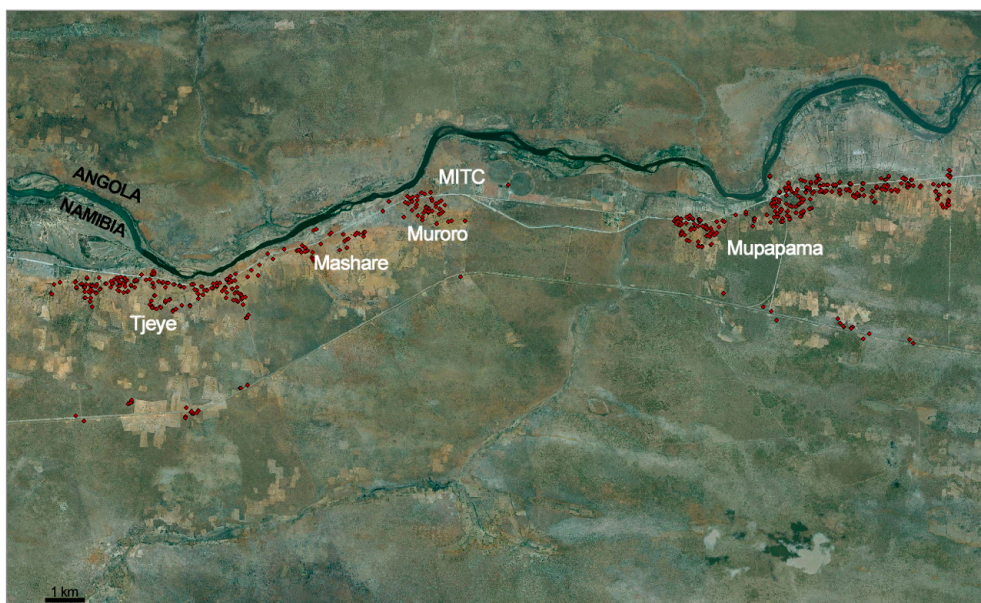


Figure 2: Mashare research site (map created by Jan Wehberg, University of Hamburg; aerial photograph taken from “Google Maps”)

The majority of people in the Mashare Area live in households with their nuclear families, often together with a number of extended family members. Their houses are mainly constructed out of wood and clay (76%) with roofs of grass (72%) or corrugated iron (26%) and are surrounded by reed or wood fences. Only few people have access to tap water (28%) and electricity (4%).<sup>57</sup> There are a number of primary schools and basic health facilities in the area. Roadside shops and informal vendors sell essentials such as cooking ingredients, batteries, mobile phone credit, and alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. *Shebeens* – unofficial bars – offer both homemade and industrially produced alcoholic beverages, and are frequently used as meeting places. In order to visit government offices, the hospital or one of the many supermarkets, the residents of Mashare have to travel to Rundu. The return trip by shared taxi costs 50 Namibian Dollars (NAM).<sup>58</sup> Despite the rather high cost, many people travel to Rundu regularly to visit family or friends or to run necessary errands. As in other rural areas of Namibia, many residents of the Mashare Area suffer from low incomes, poor education and health problems such as HIV/AIDS, malaria,

<sup>57</sup> Data from TFO socio-economic baseline survey (see page 117; footnote 54).

<sup>58</sup> At the time of my research this was approximately 5 Euro. As a comparison, the old age pension paid to every citizen from the age of 60 years was 500 NAD per month.

bilharzia and alcoholism (see Pröpper 2009: 263ff; Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 84ff).

Three zones of land- and resource use may be distinguished in the Mashare Area. The river, its banks and floodplains are used for fishing, the extraction of water, reed, grass and other natural resources as well as for livestock grazing and a few vegetable gardens. Further south (and at higher elevation) the landscape merges into woodland used for grazing and the extraction of forest resources such as timber, firewood, wild fruits and plants. Only a few settlements, surrounded by fields, are located in this area. A fertile strip of ancient floodplains is situated between the river and woodland zones. This is where most of the agricultural and social activities take place. It is dominated by dwellings and subsistence farmland, characterised by relatively small fields with open access. Large areas of fenced-off privatised or state-owned property interrupt the communal farmland: There is one commercial farm, as well as two agricultural training and research institutes in the area that are run by the Namibian government. The *Mashare Irrigation Training Centre* (MITC) mainly trains small-scale farmers in irrigation agriculture in order to qualify them to work in state-owned or private commercial farms. The *Mashare Agricultural Development Institute* (MADI) conducts research and training in cattle breeding. The opportunity to compare several different forms of land use within close proximity was one of the reasons the Mashare Area was chosen as a research site.

Subsistence farming and natural resource use characterise the Mashare Area both culturally and economically. The vast majority of households are engaged in farming (88%). The crops mainly cultivated are millet (by 86% of all households), maize (79%) and sorghum (37%), supplemented by vegetables such as beans, pumpkins, groundnuts and melons. Millet is the most important subsistence crop for 88% of the households in Mashare.<sup>59</sup> Livestock farming, especially of goats and cattle, is another important activity in the Kavango. However, ownership of livestock is distributed rather unevenly. Whereas families with additional incomes

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<sup>59</sup> Data from TFO socio-economic baseline survey (see page 114; footnote 54).

from wages, remittances or pensions own most of the livestock, almost half of all households do not own any cattle (41%) or goats (49%) (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 100-103). This lack is significant, since cattle are the most important form of draught power for ploughing. In the Kavango, more than 90% of the cultivated land is ploughed with the help of oxen. Farmers with access to cattle are able to cultivate much more land than those who have to rent or borrow oxen in order to plough their fields. Furthermore, farmers who have to rely on someone else's oxen are usually forced to plough late in the season, which has a negative impact on their yields. In addition to the money or service they have to invest in return for the use of the cattle for ploughing, therefore, they also reap smaller harvests (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 94; see also Pröpper 2009: 183; 205f). In summary, the inability to afford oxen decreases the potential yield in cropping and imposes additional costs. These multiple disadvantages constitute a vicious circle keeping poor farmers in poverty. Within the Mashare research site, only 37% of the households own oxen used for ploughing, while 46% have to borrow or rent cattle from someone else, and 17% do not use oxen for ploughing.<sup>60</sup>

Resources from the river and the forest play an important role for both subsistence and income purposes: While 85% of all households catch fish, 38% collect medicinal plants, roots (69%), fruits (97%), nuts (98%), thatching grass (97%), reeds (79%), wood for construction (96%) and firewood (100%).<sup>61</sup> However, population growth in the area has led to overuse of land and resources. While fish, game and wild fruit were abundant in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, they have become increasingly scarce. Shifting cultivation has become difficult close to the river since there is no more pristine land to be cleared for farming. The fertility of many fields that have been cultivated for years has declined since nutrients in the form of manure or fertilisers are hardly ever added. This makes farming even more difficult in an area in which cropping is already inefficient due to poor soil quality as well as low and unpredictable rainfalls (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 92ff). The need for additional cash income in order to compensate these losses has led to an increased exploitation

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<sup>60</sup> Data from TFO socio-economic baseline survey (see page 117; footnote 54).

<sup>61</sup> Data from TFO socio-economic baseline survey (see page 117; footnote 54).

of certain resources such as timber and thatching grass. The associated commoditisation of natural resources is fuelled by a rising demand for consumer goods (Pröpper 2009). Today, rural household economies depend on a mix of subsistence activities, goods or services traded in kind, and cash incomes; the last of these in the form of wages, pensions and remittances, as well as money from the sale of agricultural products and natural resources. While the various sources detailing household incomes are extremely difficult to interpret and evaluate, data generated by the TFO survey show the relative importance of cash incomes compared to farming and natural resources in the Mashare Area. At the same time the survey suggests a high degree of social stratification, with only a few relatively wealthy people and a vast majority of low-income households (see also Domptail et al. 2012).

The Kavango Region is inhabited by members of five ethnic groups, each with fixed territorial boundaries: the Kwangali, Mbunza, Shambyu, Gciriku and Mbukushu (from West to East). The ancestors of the inhabitants of these former kingdoms originated in the upper Zambezi Area (today south-western Tanzania) and settled around the Kavango River in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> The five groups share similar *Bantu* languages and matrilineal descent systems. (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 35; see also Malan 2000: 41ff). Each of them is politically and religiously led by a king or queen known as the *Hompa*,<sup>63</sup> who has considerable political and juridical power, especially over land and resources, within the Namibian system of co-existence between statutory and traditional political and legal institutions (d'Engelbronner-Kolff 2001). The Mashare research site is situated within Shambyu territory.

During the past century, the Kavango Region's population increased sharply, from an estimated 4,500 people in 1911, to 21,873 individuals counted during a

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<sup>62</sup> While hunter-gatherers have populated the area around the river for tens and perhaps hundreds of thousand years, evidence for crop farming goes back approximately 1,100 years (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 35).

<sup>63</sup> Their succession may be traced back over almost 200 years; since 1989 the *Hompa* has been Angelina Matumbo Ribebe, who lives in the village of Kayengona (Kavango Regional Council 2012).

census in 1951 (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 79), to 222, 500 inhabitants in 2011 (NPC 2012). The general population growth was paralleled by increasing urbanisation. The population of the region's capital and only major city, Rundu, grew from 1,500 people in 1971 (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 82) to 61,900 in 2011, and is now the country's second largest town after Windhoek (pop. 322,500) just ahead of Walvis Bay (pop. 61,300) (NPC 2012: 57). In addition to endogamous factors such as the decline in child mortality, this enormous growth rate was fuelled by the large number of refugees from Angola who settled in the Kavango during the civil war (1975-2002). Today, 15% of the rural population and one third of the residents of Rundu speak a language originating in Angola as their mother tongue. 5% of the population in Kavango speak "other Namibian" languages, of whom roughly 4,800 are San, mostly living in remote areas in the East. Only 2% of the population speak a European language as their mother tongue (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 78).

Access to land is an important question when dealing with natural resources. At the same time, the *land issue* – public debate over the ownership and redistribution of territory as part of land reform<sup>64</sup> – is certainly one of the most tangled and politicised questions in Namibia – a country in which 44% of the territory is still owned by only 5,000 mostly (but not exclusively) white farmers (Melber 2005: 136). As the Kavango was never settled by white farmers, these developments did not have an immediate impact on my research in Mashare and will therefore not be discussed in detail. I will however outline how the colonial and apartheid systems controlled access to land in ways that still affect society in the Kavango today. While land was abundant in the pre-colonial era, both the colonial economy and the apartheid system were premised on the dispossession of the black population and their forced displacement to marginal areas of the country. This provided white settlers not only with the land for their agricultural activities but also forced black people into wage labour. The "native reserves" in

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<sup>64</sup> The land reform entails the redistribution of farmland owned by white Namibians to black farmers (see for example Hunter 2004). For the relationship between land, politics, social inequality and race in post-independence Namibia see Melber (2005). For a Marxist perspective on the "history of land dispossession" in Namibia see Werner (1993). For a case-study on the effects of the land reform on a rural community in central Namibia see Schütte (2009).



which the indigenous population had to live thereby served the white farmers as a source of inexpensive labour (Werner 1993). Significantly, the system of communal land ownership that regulates access to land in the Kavango today, has its foundation in the colonial era.

A system of communal land tenure ensured that every household had access to land. But the same system denied small communal farmers the opportunity to accumulate capital for themselves. As a result, reserve households were generally dependent on wage labour to secure their subsistence needs; at least one member of a household had to engage in wage labour to augment incomes and harvests. But access to land – however tenuous – also implied that capitalist employers could pay wages well below the value of labour power. In addition, it was assumed that the dependents of workers could maintain themselves off the land, thus relieving the colonial state of the necessity to supply pauper rations and look after the old. (Werner 1993: 136)

Whereas Werner argues that the Kavango, as the entire northern part of what is today Namibia, was never occupied by white farmers, so that “peasant production was largely left intact” (1993: 139), Mendelsohn and el Obeid (2004) emphasise that the Kavango was nevertheless part of the colonial economy. The area was declared “Okavango Native Reserve” in 1937 and the administrative centre was moved to Rundu, “which had been established as a recruiting centre to supply labour to white farmers south of Kavango” (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2004: 54). In this context, d’Engelbronner-Kolff describes the “devastating effects” of migration labour “on pre-colonial modes of production as well as the social and cultural life” (2001: 88). Despite the incidence of labour migration in the Kavango being significantly lower than in other parts of northern Namibia, due to the relatively good prospects for subsistence farming, she emphasises that the absence of predominantly male labourers<sup>65</sup> from their home areas has affected family life and altered gender roles, even after the abolition of the system of contract labour after independence (2001: 89). The system of communal land tenure during colonial times, described by Werner (1993: 136) above, as keeping the population dependant on wage labour, resembles the

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<sup>65</sup> The continued absence of men due to migrant labour is evidenced by figures from the latest Namibian census, with a population of 7,500 men and 8,100 women counted in the Mashare Constituency (NPC 2012: 43).

situation in rural Kavango today. Many farmers are trapped in a cycle of poverty: unable to live off subsistence agriculture alone, they depend on alternative sources of income such as paid labour and the extraction of natural resources.

So-called “traditional authorities” played an important role in the administration of the “native reserves”. Neither the German regime nor the South African authorities were interested in or able to directly control the territory north of the “police zone”<sup>66</sup> due to strong military resistance, especially by the Oshivambo-speaking population in the north-west, as well as the area’s assumed lack of economic importance. The colonisers therefore decided to exercise their influence indirectly. Their intention was “to retain, and later also largely increase and even invent, the autonomy and power of the traditional authorities, so that they were properly equipped to control their communities” (d’Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 60; see also Werner 1993: 136). The exertion of influence over and through these traditional leaders in Kavango goes back to the 1920s, when the South African administration intervened in the succession of *Hompas* and pressurised them to abolish “certain customary practices” which were seen as inappropriate (d’Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 78). In the 1940s the South African administration introduced an additional level of traditional leadership in Shambyu, namely that of the *Foroman*<sup>67</sup> or head(wo)men, who presided over districts of varying sizes. This move seems to have been triggered by the establishment of new villages far from the *Hompas*’ place of residence, coupled with the South Africans’ general perception of the *Hompas* as lacking authority and power (d’Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 78-81). Keulder confirms that the establishment of this institution was a preferred means of colonial control throughout what is now Namibia:

... all headmenships [in Namibia] have their origins in the colonial era. In some cases these were constructed by the colonial Administration to replace other

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<sup>66</sup> In 1907 the German colonial administration announced that it could only offer police protection near roads and railway lines in central and southern Namibia, an area they termed “Polizei Zone”. This separated Namibia into the “police zone” settled by white farmers and the “native reserves” in which black people were forced to live in. This categorisation was continued under South African occupation (Werner 1993: 139).

<sup>67</sup> The term is borrowed from the Afrikaans “*voorman*” (foreman) (d’Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 81).

forms of leadership ... In other cases these structures were created to assert control over resettled communities, or to organise and control so-called acephalous communities. (Keulder 2010: 158f)

From the 1950s, the colonial administration of Kavango was shifted to the “Department of Bantu Administration and Development,” which reinforced “indirect rule” not only by advising and training traditional leaders, but also by compensating them materially or financially for their continuing cooperation. This policy was intensified with the introduction of “self-government” in the 1970s, when the South African administration strengthened and further institutionalised the tribal authorities, for instance by constructing a “tribal office” near Kayengona or by giving weapons and military training to the “tribal police” (d’Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 80ff). Unsurprisingly, this close relationship with the apartheid regime lead to an erosion of authority, especially during the transition to independence (d’Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 60). Interestingly, while the succession of *Hompas* was conventionally decided by members of the royal family together with the *Matimbi* (senior advisors) of the former *Hompa*, the latest succession of a *Hompa* in Shambyu in 1989 was based on an election in which all community members were allowed to vote. Whereas d’Engelbronner-Kolff states rather generally that this innovation was “influenced by democratic principles as well as beliefs of the Sambyu<sup>68</sup> community who felt that a person capable of managing current social, economic, political and legal developments should be chosen” (2001: 98), it seems that the decision might have been intended to counter the aforementioned erosion of authority.

Exerting control over and through “traditional” leadership was a central feature of the South African policy of indirect rule within what is now Namibia. However, as Keulder asserts, such processes were by no means unidirectional. Referring to Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1992) notion of *invented tradition*, Keulder argues that “tradition” also became an important strategic resource for the colonised: “tradition is considered to be flexible and fluid and can be changed to suit a current purpose. The carriers of tradition are also its creators and, hence, are agents who use this resource to shape or influence current outcome” (Keulder

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<sup>68</sup> This is another common spelling for Shambyu.

2010: 152). Both colonisers and colonised thus contributed to the inventions of such “traditions” – a practice that has continued since independence. The role of “traditional authorities” and the nature of their relationship with the national government were defined in the Namibian Constitution (RoN 2009) and meticulously codified in the “Traditional Authorities Act” (RoN 2000). At the same time, tradition was mobilised as a political (and economic) resource by various ethnic groups and their leaders:

As a final assessment, one would have to conclude that these postcolonial inventions of traditional leadership are political in nature. Their primary aim is to access the State and its structures, resources and opportunities. Land claims and claims for recognition are based on, and legitimised through, “tradition” (even if presented in a distorted form). (Keulder 2010: 160)

One of the traditional authorities’ most important responsibilities is the allocation of communal land. After Namibia’s independence, the “native reserves” were mostly declared communal land, in total comprising 43% of the Namibian territory today (Melber 2005: 136). Of the Kavango Region’s total area of 48,456 square kilometres, 54% is designated as communal land, as opposed to private farms<sup>69</sup> (23%), conservation areas (15.5%) and others. The category “communal land” implies that the Namibian government owns the territory, but the people living in the area have the right to use it. Whereas large farm units are usually assigned as leaseholds by the *Hompas*, in consultation with so called “Land and Farming Committees,” local head(wo)men control the allocation of new land to small-scale farmers with the approval of the *Hompas*. (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 112-116). Land for small-scale cropping and residential purposes is administered similarly throughout the Kavango:

Allocations are for life, and nothing is paid when land is allocated. Land is normally allocated to men, since men usually live close to their parental homes when they marry. Properties in any local area therefore tend to be owned by closely related men. Land is also seen as traditionally being a ‘male preserve’.

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<sup>69</sup> Most of these farms have been allocated to members of the Namibian elite and are often economically unproductive (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 116ff). Recently, farm ownership seems to be more a lifestyle choice than motivated by economic reasons (Sherbourne 2003).

Properties may not be sold and land that is permanently abandoned reverts to the traditional authority. (Mendelsohn 2008: 60)

Non-allocated land such as pastures and woodlands may be used by all community members – even though it is officially under the authority of the head(wo)men. This means that livestock owners may graze their cattle and goats on local commonages without special permission. However, livestock owners from other villages require permission from the respective head(wo)man if they want to temporarily access local water or grazing (Mendelsohn 2008: 61).<sup>70</sup> Land allocations are usually negotiated orally, and are subject to ongoing debate (Pröpper 2009: 292). In order to counter disputes over customary land rights resulting from the informal nature of these allocations, the Namibian Parliament passed the “Communal Land Reform Act” in 2002 (RoN 2002). While this legislation is intended to secure the land rights of subsistence farmers through a process of registration, it may at the same time be seen as a form of control over the traditional leaders (Meijs & Kapitango 2009). In the Kavango, farmers generally feel rather comfortable with the existing informal mechanisms of land allocation, and the registration of land rights as implied by the Communal Land Reform were “rather perceived as attempts to [sic] statutory control than as a necessary security mechanism” (Pröpper 2009: 296). Traditional leaders and farmers alike have been reluctant to accept the legislation, which was still not fully implemented at the time the research.

Besides access to land, the traditional leaders are also responsible for settling disputes within their communities during public community meetings and trials, while major offenses are judged at the statutory courts. On the statutory level, the residents of the Mashare Area are politically represented by the Councillor of the Mashare Constituency, one of nine constituencies in the Kavango Region. Together these elected representatives form the regional government “Kavango Regional Council” which is headed by an appointed Governor. Additionally, two of its members represent the Kavango Region in the National Council, the second tier of the Namibian Parliament. In the context of the Namibian Government’s decentralisation policy, so-called “development committees” have

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<sup>70</sup> For a detailed description of allocation criteria see Mendelsohn (2008).

been introduced on various levels (regional, constituency, village, settlement, amongst others). These are concerned with community issues such as

- identifying and assessing community needs
- preparing development projects for submission to the Regional Council
- encouraging self-help projects
- monitoring administration and development projects
- providing assistance in the maintenance of law, order and security
- providing assistance during emergencies (Töttemeyer 2010: 144)

Village Development Committees (VDCs) are comprised of various government representatives, a traditional leader, and a number of community members.

While the head(wo)men dominate political life in rural areas, the VDC members function as the regional government's local representatives and as a statutory counterpart of the traditional leaders. Land- and resource users in the Kavango thus operate within a complex web of institutions, typical of the legal (and political) pluralism that characterises Namibian society (d'Engelbronner-Kolff 2001: 72). As I have discussed within this chapter, these institutions and their interactions are deeply rooted in the country's colonial past.

### **5.3. Liparu Lyetu: Film Content**

In the following, I will describe the content of *Liparu Lyetu*, mainly to make the following discussion of the film production more tangible for readers who have not had the opportunity to watch the film. In addition, I will suggest some of the possible audience interpretations, provide contextualising information, and discuss the ideas and motivations that influenced certain editorial decisions.

While the meaning of films is largely construed by its viewers (see for example Hall 1973), the filmmaker's construction of a film is based on certain narrative conventions and is guided by possible readings (see Henley 2006). It is therefore important to consider my ambiguous role in the project. While the film was intended primarily as a work produced by local people for a predominantly local audience, I had great influence – especially in the editing, but also more generally as a producer and workshop facilitator. My own input in the filmmaking, as well as my interpretations below, reflect my position as an outsider.

The film is the result of a film workshop I organised for a group of villagers from the Mashare Area of northern Namibia. The participants in the workshop chose the title *Our Life*, or *Liparu Lyetu* in the local language, Rushambyu, in order to highlight the importance of the resources featured in the film – as well as that of nature more generally. The 32-minute-long film was shot in 16:9 format in HD quality. The film’s dialogues are conducted in Rukwangali and Rushambyu, two closely related languages most commonly spoken in the Mashare Area, and subtitled in English for non-local viewers. *Liparu Lyetu* consists mainly of observational material and various forms of dialogue, ranging from formal interviews with politicians and so-called experts to informal conversations between the protagonists as they demonstrate their activities. The film was edited within the conventions of continuity editing, characterised by hard cuts between shots featuring different camera perspectives and frame sizes.

The film is divided into six sequences, separated by fades to black. The introductory sequence is a self-presentation by the participants, combined with contextualising information about the film and the TFO project. The subsequent three main sequences each depict one particular area of resource use: *Manketti* nuts,<sup>71</sup> pearl millet (*Mahangu*), and resources from the river. In the final sequence, local politicians and “experts” on natural resources are interviewed about certain aspects of natural resource use, followed by a final statement by one of the filmmakers. The following list of sequences gives an overview of the film’s structure.

### Table of sequences

<i>Number</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Introduction	00:00 min	02:55 min	2:55 min
2	<i>Manketti</i> Nuts	02:55 min	09:18 min	6:23 min

<sup>71</sup> Scientific name: *Schinziophyton rautanenii*; Rushambyu name *Mongongo*. Common throughout North Eastern Namibia, *Manketti* trees grow up to 20 metres high. The reddish plum-shaped fruit ripens from February to April and is an important source of food in many rural communities. The nuts have a thin outer layer of flesh, which may be eaten raw or cooked, or used in the production of the homemade liquor *Kashipembe*. The nut itself is crushed and used for cooking or the production of oil (Hailwa 1998).

3	Millet Farming	09:18 min	16:05 min	6:47 min
4	Fishing	16:05 min	23:51 min	7:46 min
5	Expert Interviews	23:51 min	30:46 min	6:55 min
6	Credits	30:46 min	32:00 min	1:14 min

### 5.3.1. Introduction

The film starts with white titles on a black screen informing the viewers that “the following film was conceived and shot for the TFO research project by a group of villagers from the Mashare Area” – situating the film from the beginning in the context of research and participatory filmmaking (00:02-00:09). As the titles fade out, the sound of rhythmic clapping commences over the black screen. The image of a flowing river is faded in, and male and female voices are heard raised in song, praising the Kavango River. After a selection of long shots of the wide, blue river, the image cuts to the group of singers: individually dressed women and men standing in line in front of a green millet field as they perform their song while clapping their hands to the rhythm. As the words of the song make references to “farming in Kavango” and the “fruits of Kavango,” images of a green millet field, a granary full of harvested *Mahangu* and a pile of *Manketti* nuts are sequentially displayed. The image then cuts back to the singers, and their performance comes to an end with a long ululation, commonly used to express excitement during public events.



Figure 3: Participants performing the film's intro song (Gruber et al. 2011: 01:10)<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> All film stills have been exported without subtitles.



A hard cut leads to the next sub-sequence, in which the singers introduce themselves individually in a vox-pop style. They are shown one after another in a series of uncut medium or close-up shots: standing in front of trees and looking straight at the camera, each introduces her- or himself briefly by name, place of residence and the way in which he or she uses natural resources (Gruber et al. 2011: 01:11-02:27):



*“My name is  
Mashare  
Johannes. I live in  
Mashare. I use the  
resources from the  
river, mostly line  
fishing.”*

Figure 4: Johannes Mashare (Gruber et al. 2011: 01:12)



*“My name is  
Veronica  
Kapumburu. I live  
in Tjeye. I use the  
resources from the  
river.”*

Figure 5: Veronica Kapumburu (Gruber et al. 2011: 01:29)



*“My name is  
Immanuel Thobias.  
I live in Mahahe. I  
do farming.”*

Figure 6: Thobias Immanuel (Gruber et al. 2011: 01:34)

*“My name is  
Zangata Christofine.  
I live in Muroro. I  
collect wild fruits  
such as Maguni,  
Matu, Makwewo,  
Nomaka, Nompundu  
and Nongongo.”*



Figure 7: Christofine Zangata (Gruber et al. 2011: 01:53)



*“My name is  
Clementine  
Shimbumburu. I  
come from Tjeye. I  
go to the river to  
catch fish with my  
Yintunga fish  
traps.”*

Figure 8: Clementine Shimbumburu (Gruber et al. 2011: 02:03)



*“My name is Kwandu  
Samwel Ticki – ,Weezy’.  
I live in Mashare  
Constituency in a village  
called Mupapama. I use  
resources from the  
inland. Wild fruits like  
Manketti nuts.”*



Figure 9: Samwel Kwandu (Gruber et al. 2011: 02:07)



*“My name is  
Simata Angeline. I  
live in Mashare. I  
do farming.”*

Figure 10: Angeline Simata (Gruber et al. 2011: 02:27)

After these self-presentations, one of the filmmakers, Christofine Zangata, a middle-aged woman wearing a grey t-shirt, a headscarf and a blue necklace, reappears as the filmmakers’ representative and the presenter and guide for the duration of the film. She informs the viewers that all of the singers come from different villages in the Mashare Area before continuing: “The Future Okavango research project brought us together to make a film about our relationship with the environment” (02:32-02:41). Christofine then informs the viewers about the location of the Mashare Area at the boarder between Namibia and Angola, before the sequence ends with her image fading to black.

The sequence combines an introduction of the film’s overall topic – natural resources and livelihoods – with the filmmakers’ self-presentation. Visually and acoustically, the Kavango area is established as a beautiful and rich source of sustenance – with its river, fields and fruits – while the singers, representing the

inhabitants of the Mashare Area, are depicted as a part of that environment. In the second part of the sequence, the singers are introduced as individuals: women and men of different age groups and from different villages. While they appear quite diverse in age, appearance and manner, the singers are all united in the fact that they all rely on the same resources – those of the river, the fields and the fruits of Kavango. In their self-introductions, the participants are depicted as proud and optimistic users of abundant natural resources – an image called into question later in the film. The introduction filmically establishes the group of participants, and powerfully confirms the role of nature in their lives. This was one of the most popular sequences during our village screenings. Many audience members recognised the traditional song that forms the basis of the performance, and joined in with the singing and clapping. The song and the images of the landscape, and later of the protagonists, offer points of reference and possibilities for identification which are vital for the film's local reception.

### **5.3.2. Manketti Nuts**

The film's title, *Liparu Lyetu – Our Life* is superimposed in white letters on a black screen prior to the following sequence, dealing with collecting and processing of *Manketti* nuts. Image and sound are then faded in, depicting Christofine Zangata in a medium shot, dressed differently from the way she appeared in the introduction, in an orange T-Shirt and headscarf, looking out of the frame. As Christofine introduces herself (again), the camera zooms out and pans to the left to reveal her interlocutors: a couple with a small child, all dressed in worn-out clothes, standing in front of a thatch-roofed hut with a millet field in the background. Christofine explains, "I came to you to learn about the use of natural resources in Kavango. We are making a film to show outside audiences how we live with our nature here" (03:10-03:16). The other woman, Siwana Nekongo, replies that their livelihoods depend on wild fruits like *Manketti* nuts, which they prepare as a puree called *Ehayi*. When Zangata asks them if they could demonstrate how this is done, the couple agree, and the male protagonist, Stephanus Ihemba, explains that he collects the nuts "inland" – away from the river – to bring them back home.

The image cuts to a long shot of grassland with two huge trees in the background. Stephanus Ihemba, followed by Christofine, enters the frame from behind the camera and walks towards the tree. When they reach the tree, there is a jump cut to a medium shot of the protagonists. Gathering the reddish *Manketti* fruits from the ground and putting them into a large white sack, the man emphasises in a typical local idiom that wild fruits are a public good: “Whoever is strong enough can come and collect them” (04:07-04:15). The following medium shot of huge bags full of nuts standing in a thatch-roofed shelter indicates that the man has already collected a large quantity of nuts and brought them back to his household. The sharp sound of hammering, followed by a close-up of a heap of brownish nuts, suggest that the preliminary peeling of the outer flesh has already been accomplished at this stage of the process. A series of close-ups then depicts the cracking of nuts: Stephanus Ihemba, sitting cross-legged on the ground with an axe handle tucked underneath his knee, positions one nut at a time on the sharp edge of the blade and hits it with a metal device to cut it in half. While he collects the nut meat in an enamel dish, the shells fall into the sand. Christofine, sitting next to him on a stool, watches Ihemba as he talks about his work.

In general contrast to members of Western audiences, most local viewers find this sub-sequence extremely funny, as the cracking of *Manketti* nuts is typically considered a female chore. Seeing a man perform this work therefore provoked audience reactions of amazement and laughter, which was further amplified by the clumsiness of our protagonist’s performance. To an insider, Stephanus Ihemba’s lack of skill at this task is clearly visible in the film – even though Sinkumba and I removed some of the more obvious moments of ineptitude during the editing. As the unused footage reveals, several times Stephanus Ihemba even ended up laughing at himself during the filming.

The next sub-sequence, depicting the preparing of the *Ehayi* puree, opens with a close-up of a heap of *Manketti* nuts being poured into a wooden mortar with a swooshing sound. The pounding of nuts in front of the thatched structure, which turns out to be the household’s kitchen, is narrated through a number of medium shots and close-ups. As the rhythmic sound becomes progressively softer, an

extreme close-up of the mortar's contents shows a dry and grainy substance. After adding some water, Siwana Nekongo stirs the grey-brown liquid with her pounder and finally decants it carefully into an aluminium pot.



Figure 11: Pounding of *Manketti* nuts (Gruber et al. 2011: 05:10)

The next shot depicts the same pot on an open fireplace, the liquid simmering. Siwana Nekongo and Christofine now sit inside the hut, next to each other, close to the fireplace. A lively and amicable conversation develops as the protagonist stirs the thickening paste and eventually pours the oil that emerges into an enamel bowl, while the *Ehayi* puree stays in the pot. The accompanying discussion explains the series of steps involved in making the *Ehayi*, as well as dealing with more general issues related to wild fruits. At first Siwana Nekongo emphasises that “a lot of people depend on *Manketti* nuts for their subsistence” especially when the agricultural season is over (06:26-06:30).



Figure 12: Christofine Zangata and Siwana Nekongo (Gruber et al. 2011: 07:05)

Later, she explains that the oil may be used for cooking, while the puree is eaten either by itself or with vegetables. When Christofine asks about other uses of the resource, Nekongo tells her that *Manketti* nuts are also used to make the traditional liquor called *Kashipembe*. This is the most popular alcoholic drink in rural Kavango and often produced in order to generate an additional cash income. The two women then jokingly comment on the issue of cultural change.

Christofine: I have heard that the oil is used to heal the skin of babies. Is that so?

Nekongo: Our forefathers used it like this but we don't do it anymore.

Christofine: Why not?

Nekongo: We buy our medicine from the shop.

Christofine: Have we lost our culture?

Nekongo: Yes we have. (7:38-8:02)

While this conversation associates the use of *Manketti* nuts with what the participants later highlighted as “traditional practices”, Christofine’s comment, after tasting a spoonful of *Ehayi*, links it to the modern world: “It’s nice. It’s just like a puree from the shop. Very rich and tasty” (08:41-08:50). The combination of these statements affirms the use of wild fruits both as “traditional” and as highly valued today. This consistency is supported visually: While the scene is shot in a simple wooden structure, the actors are dressed in Western clothes, and props from the modern world, such as plastic buckets, canisters and a mobile phone in Christofine’s hands occupy the stage. At the end of the sequence Siwana Nekongo is asked to give a statement. She responds by encouraging the viewers to collect wild fruits in order not to starve. When asked how these resources can be protected from depletion, Siwana Nekongo advises the audience to stop *veld fire*, suggesting that the common practice of burning the fields in order to clear them poses a serious danger to natural resources.

Christofine is further established in this sequence as a community researcher, who acts as a guide through the film and mediates between filmmakers, protagonists and the audience. Her role as a researcher serves as a narrative device: the sequence is obviously arranged for the film and driven by Zangata’s questions. Both protagonists seem rather insecure and shy at the beginning, but



as the scene unfolds, the two women relax into an increasingly natural conversation, characterised by appreciation and mutual respect. While their living conditions are depicted as extremely basic, the protagonists are represented as skilful, knowledgeable and responsible experts on their environment. The sequence strongly suggests that these people depend heavily on the use of natural resources for their livelihoods and that *Manketti* nuts are a significant contribution. This framing attributes value to natural resources and to the protagonists' way of life.

### 5.3.3. Millet Farming

The sequence that then follows opens with a black screen; a brittle crackling sound begins just before the image fades in to disclose a pair of hands in a close-up shot. One of the hands is holding a knife, cutting off the spike of a millet plant held firmly by the other hand, which also clasps a number of other harvested spikes. In a long hand-held tracking shot, the camera follows the hands as they grasp and cut off a second spike and finally reveals the person's face wearing an expression of concentration. It belongs to Francisca Kapande, a small woman dressed in a turquoise shirt and a dark headscarf. The camera follows her movements until a tall and skinny man enters the frame, dressed in blue workwear, who is also cutting off millet spikes with a knife. The next shot depicts the couple working silently side by side, viewed from a distance. The field is overgrown with grass and the tall millet plants are scattered rather sparsely; this does not look like a prosperous field. A medium tracking shot depicts the woman as she continues her harvesting and carefully places the spikes in a basket on the ground. At the same time, a monotonously recited voice-over commentary (obviously the voice of the protagonist herself) explains the different steps of *Mahangu* farming:

You start by clearing the field. Then you pile up and burn the residue. When you are finished burning you wait for the rain. Then you start looking for oxen for ploughing. When you are finished ploughing, you plant. Then you start weeding. When the field is clear and no weed disturbs the plants then you start checking the plants. When the plants are ready you start harvesting as we are doing now. (Gruber et al. 2011: 10:10-10:55)



Both words and images represent what life in these villages is essentially about. Millet farming is the central subsistence activity for the rural population in the Kavango, and most of the villagers depend on it for survival (see Chapter 5.2). The narration describes farming as a continuous cycle that structures these people's lives, an impression underlined by the images of the repetitive and monotonous harvesting. At the same time, these shots depict the climax of the agricultural cycle and its ultimate goal. The images of a basket full of huge ripe millet spikes, which closes this sub-sequence, symbolises fertility, prosperity and wellbeing.



Figure 13: Francisca Kapande (Gruber et al. 2011: 10:22)

This image is followed with a sub-sequence consisting of an interview with Francisca Kapande, standing in her field; the questions are asked from off camera by workshop participant Tobias Immanuel. On being asked why part of her field was not cultivated, Francisca Kapande explains that the family does not possess any oxen and therefore depends on other people's cattle for ploughing. However, by the time they may use these oxen, which are loaned from the owners in exchange for money or labour, the rainy season has usually passed. This is why they had only managed to cultivate a part of their field. Her answer leads on to a discussion of the issue of livelihoods:

Thobias: Is this field enough to feed your whole family?

Kapande: No. It's not enough. I just try to get by. When you are finished harvesting, you can help someone with a big field. In payment they will give you some millet. This can help you to feed your family. I also

get some extra food from the river. I catch fish with *Yintunga* and *Muduva* fishtraps. Some of it I sell for millet or money. (11:52-12:35)

This dialogue confirms the villagers' dependence on a combination of different sources for their subsistence; their difficult living conditions and the hardships they face resonate throughout the sequence and the entire film. After touching on these fundamental issues, Thobias wants to know how the *Mahangu* is planted, and Francisca Kapande provides a detailed explanation of how she keeps some good spikes from every harvest (pointing them out to the camera) in order to use the seeds for re-planting in the following season.



Figure 14: Francisca Kapande (Gruber et al. 2011: 10:04)

A transition shows Francisca Kapande and her partner, Tadeus Mukoroli, along with two children, as they carry their harvest to their nearby homestead and transfer it into a granary made out of wood. The latter part of the transition is accompanied by a voice-over narration describing the process of storing, drying and threshing the *Mahangu*, resembling the previous voice-over in both topic and style. The interview is then continued inside the homestead, with the protagonists now sitting in the shade in front of a reed fence. Unlike the previous interview, this is edited so as to appear as a monologue: the questions have been cut out, and in addition a number of cutaway shots have been inserted as part of the continuity editing. During the interview, Francisca Kapande demonstrates a great deal of agricultural knowledge.

When you are clearing the field you must leave the remains in. The soil will get nutrients for the plants to grow faster and bigger. And after harvesting the stalks

should not be removed but ploughed in. So that the soil will get nutrients. (13:58-14:24)

This is followed by a detailed analysis of the differences between traditional *Mahangu* and the genetically modified seeds that are on sale. Francisca Kapande argues that the genetically modified millet is not well suited for the unpredictable weather conditions in the Kavango, and that its other major problem is that it cannot be replanted, obliging the farmers to buy new seed every year. As in the previous part of the film, the sequence ends with an encouraging statement delivered by the protagonists: “For us who don’t have cattle... you should just try to hand-hoe. At least you will get something to eat. You should not just sit back, because you don’t have anything” (15:50-16:05).

Capable of effectively summarising even complex issues, Francisca Kapande is established as a highly knowledgeable and convincing authority on farming. The depth and quality of her information was confirmed by experienced farmers, who told us that some of the information contained in this sequence was completely new to them. Even some of my TFO colleagues were impressed by her rich and detailed knowledge, some of which is affirmed by the literature.<sup>73</sup> Beyond her evident agricultural knowledge, though, this part of the film is haunting, discussing the difficult living conditions of rural dwellers and issues of poverty poignantly, yet without a hint of self-pity. The reactions during our screenings suggest that the *Mahangu* sequence is the most captivating part of the film for local audiences. Most viewers were absolutely mesmerised during this sequence, as opposed to the other parts, during which people were often commenting and joking. In contrast to the previous sequence, which was characterised by Christofine’s constant interaction, Francisca Kampane is the driving force of this part, and very much takes centre stage. The filmmakers remain in the background, the impact of which is further supported by its distant and sober cinematography.

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<sup>73</sup> For example, the relevance of oxen for ploughing and the implications of genetically modified *Mahangu* (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003).

#### 5.3.4. Fishing

The third main sequence commences with images of traditional *Yintunga* fish traps hung up over two wooden racks inside a quiet compound in the early morning light. Whereas local viewers immediately recognise the wooden mats, woven from long thin twigs, as being the very commonly used fish traps, members of foreign audiences are likely to be puzzled by the sight of what appear to be giant placemats, whose function will only be resolved in the course of the film. After a series of medium and close-up shots of these objects, the camera follows a woman, Mariane Muronga, dressed in a purple t-shirt and a wrap skirt, as she carefully takes down the mats and packs them up. As the pile of mats is shown in a close-up, the next scene is anticipated with the rhythmical slapping sound of flipflop sandals. A tracking shot of Mariane Muronga's feet is next, the camera following her as she walks along a footpath through high grass. The subsequent shot continues this movement but depicts her upper body, balancing the bundle of fish-traps on her head. She now walks through dense bush, signifying the passage of time and distance.

The next sub-sequence starts with a long tracking shot of Mariane Muronga's arrival at the banks of the Kavango River, which is again acoustically anticipated with the distinct sound of frogs and water birds. After her arrival, she places the bundle of fish-traps on the ground and carefully unwraps it before she takes one of the mats, walks into the shallows at the edge of the river, and clears the vegetation from a spot in the ankle-deep water. A series of close-ups then shows the woman setting up the fish trap in a rounded heart shape, leaving only a narrow opening between the upper lobes of the "heart", where the two ends of the mat point inward, and subsequently driving the miniature palisade into the muddy riverbed – first with her palms and then with a large wooden spoon that she has brought along. The following images depict Mariane Muronga in a medium long shot, facing her fish trap and holding an aluminium pot in her hand. After taking a small portion of a greyish substance from the pot, Mariane Muronga drops it into the fish-trap and flicks her fingers into the water causing a loud popping noise. Finally, she scoops a sip of water into her mouth with her hand, and blows it out followed by the word *Motopo*, which means "make it full" in Rushambyu (Gruber et al. 2011: 18:42). The woman then starts walking

through the water towards the viewer, surreptitiously acknowledging the camera before performing the same distinctive series of gestures at a second fish trap: she takes a handful of what local viewers recognise as millet-based bait from the pot and drops it into the fish-trap, before flicking her fingers and spraying out a sip of water from her mouth. Unexpectedly, Mariane Muronga then turns to address the camera directly as she demonstrates her routine, explaining in a brisk tone:

I've put the *Yintunga* in the water and I've put in the bait. The fish enters through here. Once it's in, there is no way out if you quickly close the entrance. This is the bait we make from *Mahangu*. And this here [blowing out water] is praying to God to have mercy on you. So you catch more fish. (Gruber et al. 2011: 19:03-19:28)

After demonstrating the ritual for the camera again, Mariane Muronga turns away from the camera and breaks out in silent laughter, as the image fades to black. The demonstration of the fishing prayer is a turning point in the protagonist's acting and interaction with the filmmakers. Whereas until this point Mariane Muronga has scarcely even acknowledged the camera, after twice performing the fishing-ritual she continually explains to the camera what she happens to be doing at the time.



Figure 15: Mariana Muronga performing the “fishing ritual” (Gruber et al. 2011: 18:58)





Figure 16: After the performance (Gruber et al. 2011: 19:31)

As the image is faded in again Mariane Muronga comments: “I’ve come from home to check if there is fish in the *Yintunga* I put in the morning. I take some bait. I also take the pot along to put the fish in” (19:33-19:56), as she collects her equipment together. A tracking shot then follows her to the first fish-trap. After closing its entrance, she starts moving both hands gently in an obviously highly practiced manner through the murky water, groping for fish. However the trap is empty and she puts some additional bait into the trap and continues to wade through the water explaining, “there is no fish because the water is very cold here” (20:22-20:25). Arriving at the next fish-trap, she quickly closes its entrance and again starts checking for fish. An over-the-shoulder shot depicts her hands gently moving through the water while pot and cup float next to the fish-trap on the glistening water. This time Mariane Muronga is lucky. After a few strokes in the water, she gets hold of a tiny silvery fish that she presents to the camera before dropping it into the aluminium pot floating next to her. The camera now shifts its focus directly onto the pot, where a growing number of jumping fish are accumulating.

The sequence’s final part consists of a series of statements, edited together from an interview with Mariane Muronga, who is depicted in close-up and medium shots, framed by the green branches of trees with the river at her back. The scene starts with a close-up of a thumb-length fish that the protagonist presents to the camera as she explains:

This fish is called *Nkundu*. It's a small *Tilapia* but it grows bigger. *Tilapia* is a big fish. If it's big and well cooked, the head is very delicious and full of fat. But *Yigcu*, *Manche* and *Shamushinga*, I didn't catch any of them. Neither *Maputu* in the evening nor *Madenepava* in the early morning. But this fish here, if the pot was full... The fish from *Yintunga* are very delicious. (Gruber et al. 2011: 21:15-21:59)

The enumeration illustrates the great variety of fish living in the Kavango River as well as the villagers' rich knowledge about them. Moreover, Mariane Muronga talks about the consumption of fish in a way that the workshop participants perceived as being typical of the area, capturing the essence of their taste. In the next section of the interview, Mariane Muronga shifts her attention to other resources from the river and explains how both thatching grass and reed are used as building materials, either for personal consumption or for sale, reinforcing one of the film's overall messages, namely that the villagers depend on a variety of different resources. Another important topic covered in the interview is the pollution of the river. Muronga explains that she does not drink the water from the river, but fetches her drinking water from a borehole. She then goes on to talk about an outbreak of a fish disease that had killed many fish in the Kavango in the previous year. Muronga's final statement is somewhat harsh and disillusioned in comparison with the motivations in the previous sequences: "Who will stop you from throwing rubbish in the river? After washing our laundry, we pour the dirty water in the river. The people downstream become sick" (22:56-23:06). After this statement, the sequence ends with a tracking shot of Muronga as she continues her checking of fish-traps with the usual ritual. After blowing out the water and the mumbling the words "make it full", Muronga glances briefly at the camera while her image fades out.

The protagonist's acting and her manner of interaction with the filmmakers not only changed in the course of the sequence but also differ greatly from that of the protagonists in the previous sequences. Mariane Muronga was certainly the film's most active and outgoing protagonist, provoking extremely positive

audience reactions during the community screenings.<sup>74</sup> Her performance of the fishing intercession was especially well received – on the one hand, because the viewers found it very funny, and on the other hand because people also appreciated that this “traditional” activity had been captured on film, allowing the possibility of it being shown to young people who no longer practice it.

This sequence is another informative example of how local and non-local audiences interpret filmic images in different ways. While viewers from the Kavango immediately recognise the objects displayed at the beginning of the sequence as fish-traps, and the subsequent action as the usual preparations of a fishing excursion, most foreigners come to understand these images only much later in the film. While the initial intention behind my editing was to build up suspense, Raphael Sinkumba suggested to me that the earlier parts of this sequence actually document a daily routine for many locals. At the same time, audiences in the Kavango were impressed by images depicting the known in new and unexpected ways. The tracking shots of Mariane Muronga’s feet and head from behind (16:52-17:09) – tellingly, some of the few shots that were filmed by me personally – were commented on with amazement during our village screenings, while they do not seem to impress Western audiences. While the sequence is appreciated by both local and foreign audiences, these examples illustrate how the decoding of films depends on both the viewers’ background knowledge and their media experience. It alludes to the difficulties inherent in films that are aimed at diverse audiences.

### **5.3.5. Experts**

The film’s final sequence shifts the attention away from the local resource users. It is a compilation of statements made by politicians and government representatives about different aspects of resource use, introduced in a transition

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<sup>74</sup> Unlike our other protagonists, Muronga was well aware of TFO and obviously perceived her participation in the project’s activities as interesting or personally beneficial. She had already volunteered in the filmmaking as part of an exercise film, registered herself for a workshop on alternative agricultural methods organised by TFO, and managed to install her niece, Clementine, in our production team.



shot by Christofine Zangata: “We are now going to ask some experts how we should protect our resources” (23:54-24:02). Christofine’s proclamation is, however, misleading, since neither the statements used in the film, nor the interviews from which they were taken, were restricted to the protection of natural resources, but cover a much wider range of subjects. Her commentary rather reflects the public discourse on nature conservation as reproduced by the Namibian government, environmental NGOs and research projects such as TFO. Her reference to the so-called experts implicitly confirms the existing power relations between the local people and these various organisations and their representatives. Based on outdated notions of knowledgeable “experts” and less knowledgeable farmers, it contradicts the underlying idea of participatory (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995) and transdisciplinary research (Wickson et al. 2006). It therefore appears to be quite contrary to the film’s depiction of local resource-users up to this point.

The introduction is followed by a hard cut to a shot of a middle-aged man introduced by the superimposed titles as “Bonifatius Wakudumo – Councillor of Mashare”, the Kavango Region’s highest-ranking elected politician and member of the SWAPO party. Dressed in a Khaki shirt, usually the preferred dress of white Namibian farmers, Wakudumo, leaning back in his office chair, delivers a rather self-satisfied speech:

God gave the people in Kavango this beautiful land. A land that has water. A river that flows from West to East. And there is soil. Close to the river as well as far inland. I therefore see a bright future for farming in my constituency. (Gruber et al. 2011: 24:02-24:50)

Another hard cut depicts the next interviewee, “Sebastian Kantema – Chief Regional Officer of the Kavango Region”, a grey-haired man dressed in a suit and tie, sitting in an office chair surrounded by piles of files and papers. Kantema, the Region’s highest-ranking administrative officer, gives a brief statement underlining the importance of subsistence farming as compared to the

industrialised agricultural production in the so-called green schemes:<sup>75</sup> “The subsistence farmers should get assistance, so they can improve. So that the green scheme production together with the subsistence farmers will uplift the living standard in Namibia and especially in Kavango” (25:03-25:25).



Figure 17: Bonifatius Wokudumo (Gruber et al. 2011: 25:43)



Figure 18: Sebastian Kantema (Gruber et al. 2011: 25:14)

After Kantema’s statement the image cuts back to Councillor Wakudumo, who encourages the people of his constituency to come to his office if they want to communicate their questions and ideas to the national government: “Through my office it will go to Minister of Agriculture John Mutorwa” (Gruber et al. 2011: 25:43-25:53). The three statements are only vaguely connected to the topics

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<sup>75</sup> The Namibian Government’s “Green Scheme Policy” (GSP) is aimed at raising the country’s staple food production and decreasing its dependence on imports. Green Schemes are huge irrigated agricultural projects (see RoN 2008).

discussed in the previous sequences and therefore appear somewhat out of context.

The next three interview extracts focus on specific questions related to fishing and farming. Remarkably, none of the three interviewees assigned to us by government offices in Rundu originated from the Kavango, and hence none of them spoke any of the local languages. The interviews were conducted in English and subsequently provided with voice-overs in Rukwangali, spoken by Raphael Sinkumba, in order to make them accessible to non-English speakers. The first shot depicts a young man dressed in a casual shirt, sitting in his office chair. Introduced as “Lazarus Nuyoma – Extension Officer in Mashare” by the superimposed titles, the man gives the following advice:

Farmers should always put manure on their fields and plough it in. And the stalks after harvesting should also be ploughed in. This will change the soil structure and add nutrients. (Gruber et al. 2011: 25:58-26:18)

The statement confirms the information on enhancing the soil quality given earlier in the film by Francisca Kampande, the protagonist in the *Mahangu* sequence. The repetition of almost identical statements in the film highlights the fact that farmers may be as knowledgeable as “experts”, implicitly supporting one of the film’s main intentions, namely to take local land users’ knowledge seriously and incorporate it into the research process.



Figure 19: Lazarus Nuyoma (Gruber et al. 2011: 26:14)



Figure 20: Bargrey Kapelwa (Gruber et al. 2011: 27:10)

The following shot depicts a middle-aged man in a smart shirt and a tie, standing underneath a tree, with the Kavango River in the background. The man, who is introduced as “Bargrey Kapelwa – Control Fisheries Inspector” advises the viewers on the use of traditional fishing methods. He confirms that traditional fishing gear may be applied in the river freely, with the exception of the *Masasa*. This is illustrated with a still image of a large body of water divided by a wooden fence that crosses the stream from one bank to the other, assembled from a number of wooden mats that resemble *Yintunga* fish traps, as Kapelwa continues:

You must not block the flow of the water completely. The reason for that is that you should not confine the movement of the fish in the river. But you can use *Masasa* as long as you leave a space for some of the fish to move to the other side. Because you should not be the only one to have access to these resources. (Gruber et al. 2011: 26:53-27:35)

His statement confirms the legality of the use of traditional fishing gear and also clearly defines the single case and precise manner in which its use is prohibited. While this information might be of little interest for foreign audiences, the participants regarded it as highly relevant since almost everyone in Mashare engages in fishing activities and there was a degree of uncertainty regarding the legality of the various methods. The filmed statement was seen as a service clarifying the relevant legislation for the benefit of the local population. The following shot depicts a younger man standing at the same spot in front of the river. In contrast to his predecessor, this man, “Cyprian Mutelo – Fisheries



Research Technician” is dressed in a casual shirt, suggesting a hierarchical relationship between the two colleagues.<sup>76</sup> Cyprian Mutelo gives an extensive explication of the details of a fish disease called “Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome” (EUS), of which there had been an outbreak in the Kavango River in the year prior to the filmmaking – implicitly referring to the events mentioned by Mariane Muronga in the fishing sequence. Accompanied by a still image of an infected fish to illustrate his descriptions, he provides some background information on the disease, before advising the viewers not to consume infected fish. As was the case with the statement provided by the previous speaker, the participants regarded the information as highly relevant since it concerns local viewers directly. Significantly, in marked contrast to the political statements made by the officials at the beginning of the sequence, these interviewees gave rather clear and precise answers to the questions they had been asked by the participants.



Figure 21: Cyprian Mutelo (Gruber et al. 2011: 28:07)

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<sup>76</sup> All interviewees chose the clothes in which they appeared in the film themselves, with no interference from anyone involved in the filmmaking.



Figure 22: Dorothy Wamunyima (Gruber et al. 2011: 29:34)

The final interview depicts a woman in a pink dress standing on the banks of the Kavango River, who is introduced by the caption as Dorothy Wamunyima of the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF). Wamunyima argues that the pollution in the river is caused by solid waste and chemicals such as soap and fertiliser that are washed into the river through the ground water. She then continues by asking rhetorically:

How can we prevent this and protect people's lives? People who are depending on the river because the river is where we get water, where we get fish and where we get life. That's why there are agreements on how to protect our river in all of the three countries. Neither the Angolans should pollute it, nor us here, nor the Botswanans. So that we will all have benefits and clean water. That's our aim, our vision and our dream. (Gruber et al. 2011: 29:45-30:32)

This statement, highlighting the river's outstanding importance and the need for cross-border cooperation, is rhetorically sophisticated. By using the first person plural, Wamunyima blurs the boundaries between experts and resource users, as well as between river users in all three neighbouring countries, and so opens up possibilities for identification. The participants found the positive outlook expressed well suited to ending the expert statements. They also wanted to counterbalance the male bias evident in the final interview sequence by giving the only female expert interviewee the last word. After Wamunyima's statement, Christofine Zangata reappears to make a final statement on behalf of the filmmakers:

Now we have seen the film and listened to what the experts say. Let's use our nature sustainably so our children and grandchildren can still use it tomorrow.  
(Gruber et al. 2011: 30:34-30:46)

While Christofine's statement reconfirms the idea of listening to the "experts" it also evokes the lives and futures of the resource users. After this short epilogue, the image fades to black before the closing credits appear, accompanied once more by the sound of the Kavango song heard at the beginning of the film. This filmic loop re-evokes the presence of the group of filmmakers as the film comes to an end.

Cinematically, the long and static block of expert interviews appears in stark contrast to the preceding sequences, which consist of a mix of observational styles and diverse forms of conversations. The voices of (mostly female) land users run the risk of being overpowered by the authoritative (and mostly male) experts, an effect that is reinforced through their positioning at the film's end. However, the expert interviews can be interpreted in different ways. In a hegemonic reading, the authorities' statements, coupled with Christofine Zangata's commentary, reproduce the given hierarchy between "knowledgeable" experts and "uninformed" resource users. The effect of such an interpretation would be that the villagers authenticate the experts (rather than vice versa, as was intended by the participants). Such a reading could be explained, following Uma Kothari (2004), with reference to processes of normalisation (Foucault 1995) through which the viewers accept the hierarchy as given, and incorporate hegemonic discourses (perceived as interesting or meaningful) into their own discourses and everyday lives. However, the interpretation intended by the film's production team establishes the land-users as just as knowledgeable as the experts, with the former revealed as the real experts on their environment. Such a reading is supported through the aforementioned repetition of nearly identical statements by land-users and experts alike. More generally, framed and juxtaposed with dynamic, visually powerful and densely narrated portraits of charismatic land-users, the expert interviewees are depicted rather static and two-dimensional. The images of representatives of local elites may also be interpreted in yet another way, as unmasking social inequalities and power

structures: smug politicians and smartly-dressed bureaucrats can be seen as detached from the realities of their “subordinates”, and as the real beneficiaries of the schemes that they endorse.<sup>77</sup>

### 5.3.6. Overall Film Analysis

*Liparu Lyetu* conveys the enormously important role of nature for the rural population in Kavango, and argues that their livelihoods depend on a combination of different natural resources. The film introduces various vital areas of resource use in the Kavango from the perspective of local villagers. It discusses current social and environmental problems such as poverty, pollution and issues connected with technological change. The film’s strong focus on “traditional” aspects of resource use was chosen by the workshop participants in negotiation with their protagonists, and was greeted with positive reactions by local audiences. It may be seen as a statement in the context of social and cultural change, and more generally as an expression connected to local cultural identity. The overwhelming presence of women emphasises (or even over-emphasises) their importance in agricultural and resource-related activities. Most significantly, the resource users are represented as strong and dignified personalities who are well aware of the complex issues governing their lives. The film’s overall reading may vary, as outlined above, depending on how viewers interpret these portrayals of the land users in relation to the subsequent “expert” interviews.

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<sup>77</sup> Such an interpretation is paralleled by a sequence of David MacDougall’s film *To Live with Herds*, in which a local politician visits a group of pastoralists in order to inform them about policy changes (MacDougall 1972: 23:48-32:58). Of course, the politician and his entourage do not speak Jie language and need interpretation. During the meeting, taking place under a tree in the open Savannah, it becomes blatantly clear that government policy does not correspond with the concerns of local people and is being implemented without their consultation. When writing about the different ways in which film protagonists shape and are shaped by filmmaking, MacDougall remembers how he was consciously “positioning him [the officer] as an instrument of government policies” but only later realised how much he was reduced “as a human being to a set of postcolonial mannerisms” (MacDougall 1998).



The differing forms of acting and interacting of protagonists and filmmakers are a recurring underlying theme in the three resource sequences. The protagonists and interviewees draw on local strategies of self-presentation, performance and storytelling. The personal introductions and the presentation of the Kavango song were especially meaningful to both participants and local viewers. The encouraging statements at the end of each resource sequence resonate with culturally specific conceptions of individual responsibility and hardships. The politicians' statements draw on local political discourse. More generally, the way in which the protagonists present their accounts draws on local narrative strategies represented in the resulting film.

## 6. Liparu Lyetu – Film Production

In an earlier diary note, I wrote that I feel more like a manager or organiser and miss just hanging out and talking to people and thereby experiencing a new environment. After this day, I got the feeling that this film workshop is more like an uncontrollable process of reaction and improvisation than any planned and organized enterprise. I am not sure if this is due to insufficient preparation or if it is just the way to do ethnographic film that I pursue and love. (Field diary April 17<sup>th</sup> 2011)

As I have outlined in Chapter 5.1, the filmmaking in the Kavango was predetermined by certain aims and expectations of the commissioning project as well as my own preferences and previous filming experiences. One film would be made in each of the countries in which TFO conducts research: Namibia, Botswana and Angola. The intended audiences were the residents of the Okavango River Basin (to raise awareness about environmental issues and the commissioning project), as well as researchers (as an aspect of transdisciplinary research) and a wide range of other audiences in African and European countries (as part of the project's communication strategy). Moreover, it was my aim to make a film that would be interesting to anthropological audiences, and I wanted to convey meaning cinematically. While these multiple aims and audiences would be difficult to satisfy with a single film, the underlying idea was to include locals in the production process as far as possible and together make a cinematically sophisticated film.

It was my responsibility to plan and organise the production, from applying for filming permission to assembling the technical equipment and organising the field trip. Due to the financial and temporal limitations imposed by the project, each film would have to be implemented within 10 weeks; that included the recruitment and training of workshop participants, the film's conception, and the organising, filming, editing, titling of, and recording of voice-overs for the film. The participants of the film workshop, who were yet to be chosen, would make conceptual decisions and accomplish the filming with a certain amount of

supervision and directing from my side. Together with local co-facilitators, I would then do the editing under the participants' direction.

The fieldtrip to Mashare took place from March 30<sup>th</sup> 2011 to June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011. My previous experience of research and filmmaking in the Kavango Region provided me with considerable background knowledge and an infrastructure that enabled me to begin my activities immediately. I therefore chose to start filmmaking for TFO in Namibia. Most importantly, I could rely on two former co-workers from Rundu who had already participated in the previous film projects described in Chapter Four. When I planned my trip to Namibia, I hired Raphael Sinkumba as an interpreter and trainer for the film workshop. Robert Mukuya had been employed by TFO as a para-ecologist and was appointed to take part in the filming. Since their involvement and their respective backgrounds, competences, and personalities proved to have considerable influence on the process of the filmmaking, I introduce them briefly here:

Born in 1982 in Kaisosi, two kilometres West of Rundu, Robert Mukuya spent most of his childhood on his grandparents' farm. From the age of nine, he attended school in Rundu. Between 1995 and 1997 he lived with his father at Mupapama and was therefore well acquainted with the Mashare Area. Soon after he left secondary school in 2000, Mukuya began working as a research assistant for BIOTA. In 2004 he was employed and trained as a para-ecologist until his contract ended in 2009. In 2010 he was hired by TFO. By the time of his involvement in producing *Liparu Lyetu*, he had become an experienced community researcher and facilitator who had acquired various filmmaking skills through his previous experiences. Mukuya's outgoing personality and his upbringing in the village contributed to his effectiveness as a community researcher, especially in rural settings.

Born in 1983, Raphael Sinkumba was raised in Rundu. After he left school, a year before he completed his higher education entrance qualification, Sinkumba worked as a freelance interpreter and research assistant for a range of research and development projects, among them BIOTA (since 2002) and TFO (since 2011). When we first met in 2007, Sinkumba was living with his grandmother,

Rebecca Kambundu, the headwoman of Nkarapamwe, in eastern Rundu. Assisting her with community meetings and trials gave him useful background knowledge on traditional leadership and decision-making processes. A skilful interpreter, translator and facilitator as well as a sharp observer, during our filmmaking Sinkumba was particularly able to sense and mediate linguistic and interpersonal nuances. He quickly acquired filmmaking skills and took over various directorial responsibilities during the production of *Mema Eparu*. He also proved to be a valuable interlocutor with whom to discuss research-related questions.

I first met Mukuya and Sinkumba during the production of *Wiza Wetu* in 2007. Over the years my relationship with them has grown deeper and more intense, since we would work closely together for several months at a time, spending days and nights filming and editing together. Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba were also my closest contacts in Rundu, and I spent much of my spare time with them, regularly going out for drinks and dinner, and once in a while for an excursion. During my absences between the projects we kept in contact through emails, phone calls and, more recently, through “Facebook”. Furthermore, Mukuya and I later met in Hamburg when he travelled to Germany to represent the BIOTA para-ecologists at a conference in Bonn in 2009. It would be naïve, however, to describe our relationships as equal. Ours was first and foremost a working relationship, characterised by our differing responsibilities and roles in the projects. Moreover, we were separated by our different social and cultural backgrounds as well as an age gap of roughly ten years. Finally, although it was not an issue that we were always directly aware of, our socially constructed racial differences had a great impact on our relationship, especially in a country that is still very much governed by the legacy of the apartheid system. While I clearly perceived Mukuya and Sinkumba as friends and colleagues, there always remained a degree of imbalance in our relations.

Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba were colleagues who had become acquainted with one another through their common engagement by BIOTA, but who only met occasionally outside their work. As outlined above, the backgrounds and personalities of these two men are quite different. During the

filmmaking their particular personalities and competences proved fruitful in many ways, for example when conflicts within the group had to be solved. Through the years I had developed a somewhat closer relationship with Sinkumba, especially during our intense cooperation for the production of *Mema Eparu*. This was challenged when Sinkumba's engagement became unstable during the second part of the making of *Liparu Lyetu*. He sometimes seemed distracted, absent or unmotivated, which he later explained as being due to his increasing responsibility in traditional leadership and the prospect of taking over the position of his grandmother. The situation developed an interesting momentum, as Mukuya compensated for Sinkumba's absences and became increasingly active. Consequently, while my two co-workers performed their different roles simultaneously in the first half of the production, they began to take turns during the latter part, with Sinkumba assisting mostly during the editing process while Mukuya helped with the village screenings.

### **6.1. Preinvestigation**

Research for the film-project began with a broad stakeholder definition and an open-ended approach. According to the project outline, an important aspect of participatory filmmaking within TFO was to enhance the communication between "scientific and non-scientific stakeholders" (TFO 2009: 231). TFO members were regarded as stakeholders whose interests were to be included in the filmmaking. I therefore started my investigations in Germany by conducting a number of interviews and informal conversations with TFO members to find out about their priorities and expectations regarding the filmmaking. Some of my interlocutors knew the various research sites from previous visits and were able to contribute with site-specific information. My conversations were guided by the following questions:

- What role can film play within TFO?
- How could film be utilised within the different sub-projects?
- Which topics are especially interesting and should be discussed in the film?

- Which stakeholders are of special importance and should therefore be included in the process of filmmaking?

During the conversations, these TFO members confirmed the communication of research results and the “inclusion” of stakeholders as significant aspects of filmmaking, as defined by the project proposal. Despite a general interest in the medium of film, not one of the researchers wanted to participate in practical filmmaking and none of them asked me to deliver a particular service for their sub-project.<sup>78</sup> The possibility of including researchers directly as workshop participants was therefore discarded. However, their suggestion that land-users and local decision-makers should be regarded as the most important stakeholders to include into the filming were taken into consideration. Some further topics for filmmaking proposed by the interviewees were:

- A comparison of different forms of land use, such as subsistence farming, commercial farming and nature conservation areas, possibly with a focus on resulting conflicts
- Methods of soil conservation
- Human-wildlife conflicts, especially in Botswana
- The destruction of vegetation through fire, especially in Angola

With this background information and guidance, preparation and research continued in Namibia with sub-project coordinator Thomas Falk. Since the filmmaking was supposed to be integrated into the overall activities of SP10, we had agreed that Falk would support me during the initial phase of the filmmaking. Falk had extensive research experience in the Kavango (2008) and many contacts with decision-makers and politicians in Windhoek and Rundu. Just before my arrival, he, together with a number of other project members, had introduced TFO to the communities in the Mashare Area, and was therefore

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<sup>78</sup> One colleague, Stephanie Domptail, an economist at the University of Gießen, proposed the idea of implementing filmmaking as a process of mutual learning (Schneider et al. 2009), either between scientists from different disciplines or between scientists and land users. However, she did not want to personally participate in such a project, due to time constraints (Interview with Stephanie Domptail 11.3.2011)

familiar with the area and its traditional leaders. In Windhoek we visited a number of local representatives of research and development organisations that were loosely associated with TFO in order to inform them about the filmmaking and find out about their perspectives on the environmental situation in the Kavango Region.

After a few days, research continued in Rundu, where I met my designated co-workers, Raphael Sinkumba and Robert Mukuya. I wanted to include them in the conception and implementation of the film workshop as early and completely as possible. We formed a team of facilitators, who accomplished the organisation and implementation of the workshop together. While decisions were made mutually, it must be acknowledged that Mukuya and Sinkumba had somewhat less active roles in the conceptual discussions. For the following two weeks we were joined by Thomas Falk and by my former co-director and commissioner Michael Pröpper who was not part of the film production team, but represented the overall project during some of our meetings with politicians and head(wo)men as a member of the TFO management. In order to obtain official permission for our work, and to ask them about their perspectives on environmental issues, we introduced the film project to the highest ranking politicians and civil servants in Rundu, such as the Governor of the Kavango Region, Maurus Nekaro; the Councillor of Mashare Constituency, Bonifatius Wakudumo, and the Chief Regional Officer of the Kavango Region, Sebastian Kantema. As the project development was still underway, we only told them that TFO was planning to make a film about land issues in cooperation with farmers in the Mashare Area. Both Kantema and Wakudumo expressed their interest in being interviewed on camera.<sup>79</sup> Asking these important stakeholders for their consent and advice was, in addition to being a way of gaining official permission to film, also a way of ensuring their personal support for the project.

The pre-investigation provided us with a good sense of the overall situation in our project area, but had only limited impact on the outcome of the workshop, as

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<sup>79</sup> Mukuya, Sinkumba and I consequently recorded an interview with Kantema as part of our research, before the start of the film workshop. Wakudumo was later interviewed by the participants as part of their workshop.

the various ideas of the interviewees in Germany, Windhoek and Rundu were not directly implemented in the resulting film. Nevertheless, the interviewees contributed to the project development in a broader sense. The stakeholders we had talked to could be thought of as participating indirectly in the filmmaking, by informing, influencing and, in some cases, limiting our work, which ensured their attention and support. This was vital for the success of the project, and was meaningful to them in that it invoked identification with and a sense of ownership of the project.

## **6.2. Who exactly participates? Setting up the Film Workshop**

Although the headman had supported us by convincing his community of the benefits of our project, I felt rather frustrated and 'cheated' after the community meeting – even more so when I learned that both boys [that had been selected to participate in our film] were his grandsons, residing in his household. In contrast to my announcement in the project proposal, I had failed to prevent the risk of elite capture. I felt abused by the headman who had appropriated our project in order to increase his prestige and strengthen his position in the community. The existing power relations within the community would thus be reinforced by our film. (Field diary April 13<sup>th</sup> 2011)

After a few days in Rundu, the facilitation team together with Thomas Falk and Michael Pröpper moved to Mashare on April 4<sup>th</sup> 2011. Situated centrally in the Mashare Area, next to the village of Muroro, we stayed at the Mashare Irrigation Training Centre (MITC) where we later conducted the film workshop.<sup>80</sup> The main task at this point was to determine the film's focus and to identify members of the local communities who would help develop the film and execute the different stages of the production. Even though they had already given their general consent to the TFO research earlier, our first activity was to visit the three head(wo)men of the area, to explain our plans and ask for their permission to conduct a film workshop within their communities. After they had agreed to our proposed work, we continued our investigations by visiting significant places,

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<sup>80</sup> The governmental institute offers vocational training in irrigation agriculture to mostly young farmers from all over Namibia. Depending on vacancies, TFO members were allowed to stay either in the spacious guesthouse or in one of the bungalow rooms intended for students. This was also where we conducted the film workshop.



conducting interviews and informal conversations about the environmental situation with different stakeholders such as teachers, horticulturalists, commercial farmers, MITC staff and numerous subsistence farmers. We adopted an open-ended approach, initiating our interviews with broad questions such as “What is important to you in relation to the environment?” or “What nature-related topic would you make a film about?” During these dialogues our interlocutors overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of natural resources for their livelihoods, as the following interview extract with headman Michael Gende of Mupapama village exemplifies:

There is a lot of fruits in our forest that people are living from. ... You get *Maguni*, *Matu*, *Makwewo*, *Nomaka*, *Nonsimba* [different wild fruits and berries], and all that. You get them in our forest. ... At the river there are also resources that we depend on. Some are not eatable like *Nombu* [reeds] we use them to build a fence around the houses like you can see here. ... We live from fish and everyone knows that. ... That's the life we have been living and also in the community we know that there's farming of *Mahangu*, *Epungu* [maize], *Nondongo*, *Nongomene* [different kinds of groundnuts] and *Makunde* [beans]. In every village where people are residing that's what their life depends on, especially *Mahangu*. The rest of the food from the forest is only to supplement this but we mainly depend on *Mahangu*. (Interview with Michael Kantema Gende April 6<sup>th</sup> 2011)

While Gende mentioned resources from all three domains eventually represented in the film, the quote illustrates the cultural significance of millet farming, which is not surprising as it is the dominant staple food in the area. Most other interlocutors confirmed this evaluation by emphasising the importance of farming followed closely by fishing and other resources from the river. Farmers talked to us about numerous problems connected to agricultural activities, such as the bad soil quality and inconsistent rainfall in the area (see also Pröpper 2009: 176) as well as the lack of oxen for ploughing (see also Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003: 94; Pröpper 2009: 183; 205f). As for the river, we were told that almost every household in the area relies on river resources, either as food or as a means of gaining monetary income. The responses of our interlocutors were so univocal that the team of facilitators took them as a directive to narrow down

the focus of the planned film to specifically address the issues of farming and/or resources from the river.

During this explorative phase, the facilitation team, together with Thomas Falk, made a number of important conceptual decisions. On the one hand, we decided that the film's overall focus should be determined by the wider Mashare community, while the more concrete questions would be decided by the participants of the production workshop. On the other hand, we realised that for logistical reasons it would be difficult to organise a workshop with a mixed group of formally employed urban professionals and subsistence farmers<sup>81</sup> and therefore decided to recruit villagers only. As we wanted to represent the entire Mashare Area, it was determined that two residents of each of the villages that had a head(wo)man would take part in the filmmaking. Assuming that a heterogeneous composition would enhance inter-group communication and make the film more diverse, we wanted the team to be balanced in terms of gender, age and social backgrounds. We thus proposed to the head(wo)men that each of them should delegate one volunteer from their respective community, while our production team would choose the other participant. This approach was based on my experience that filmmaking is often driven by individuals who develop an interest and agency during the process, and who are therefore difficult to pre-select. Furthermore this would enable us to counterbalance possible biases in the production team.

It had been stipulated in the project outline that the workshop outcome was to be a single film rather than several short pieces. With a view to the project's limited time-frame, I was convinced that it would be a good idea to limit the film's length to approximately 30 minutes.<sup>82</sup> Given these limitations, it seemed more

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<sup>81</sup> Urban professionals proved to be busy and it seemed impossible to ensure their attendance for the necessary time. Transportation between Rundu and Mashare would have posed an additional problem.

<sup>82</sup> Workshop participants and audience members later told us that they found the film too short, suggesting that that a longer and less edited film might have served local needs and preferences better than the resulting product. This serves as a reminder of the need to determine the output and aims of the project together with the participants (see Flores 2009).

promising to concentrate on one particular topic than to deal with several diverse themes. Falk proposed providing the opportunity for the villagers to make a collective decision between the two topics that had emerged during our research – farming and the river – arguing that the opportunity to make such a choice would boost the villagers' identification with the resulting film. The Namibian facilitators and my two German colleagues unanimously proposed the use of community meetings as the locally appropriate way of achieving a decision legitimised by the respective communities. Such meetings are usually called and convened by the head(wo)man of a village in order to discuss and decide issues on a local level. Community members as well as outsiders may attend the meetings and contribute to the discussions. These events are usually highly formalised, including prayers, expressions of thanks to attending authorities and detailed presentations of the parties' respective arguments. Decisions are made consensually after lengthy discussions (see Pröpper 2009: 282).

The first community meeting we had initiated was held in the village of Mupapama, under a huge tree in front of the headman's household on April 12<sup>th</sup> 2011. Although we had asked the headman to invite all the people living in his area, and had announced the meeting through the local radio service, only around 30 persons were present.<sup>83</sup> After the usual prayer and exchange of orations, we explained the aim of our project to all attending. When their resulting questions had been answered, we initiated a discussion of the film's possible focus. However, headman Gende immediately made it clear that to him, farming was the only possible choice:

But a person in Kavango to think about choosing the river and leaving farming... Unless they tell me we depend on water only. But our livelihood and food we get depends on farming. How can we choose to film the river? How are we going to show the people out there that we live from farming? Or do we all live from the river? Do we really get our breakfast, lunch and dinner from the river? We cannot do that. The water is just something you drink after you have eaten, if it was me to choose what to film, I will choose about farming that's what we should film and

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<sup>83</sup> The exact numbers of inhabitants are unknown but given the overall population of the Mashare Area, I estimate that 500 to 600 adults live in Mupapama. However, I never experienced a community meeting with more than 60 or 70 persons.

the river is just an additional thing. (Michael Gende during Mupapama community meeting April 12<sup>th</sup> 2012)

After he had so strongly positioned himself, Gende invited other community members to give their comments and their own views. These calls, however, proved to be rhetorical: publicly, everyone supported the headman; a discussion representing different positions never took place. Our proposition to have a vote between farming and the river was thus rendered impossible. Another villager made an interesting point about the idea of selecting only one topic:

People here did not decide that we will take *Kulima* [farming], but what we are saying here is that our livelihoods depend deeply on farming. At the river we also get some resources. Like it was said, we get reeds, you cut them and sell; and grass as well. But inland that's where you get the fields and you cultivate maize and *Mahangu*. ... How can you ask us to choose from the two, while we live from both? (Anonymous resident during Mupapama community meeting April 12<sup>th</sup> 2012)

Apparently, focusing on one area of resource use would not adequately reflect the villagers' perception. The underlying notion that livelihoods in the Kavango depend on a combination of resources – a perspective later confirmed by the workshop participants – was important information that we took into consideration for our subsequent activities, as discussed below. After we had talked about the focus of the film, and told the community members about our plans regarding the recruitment of participants, Gende immediately proposed that this issue be decided by the community on the spot. Our plan to choose one representative ourselves was ignored without any further discussion:

It's good while we are sitting here, you know this democracy today. If you go alone and look for someone to participate even though you are saying it's voluntary, no payment, some will say, 'why did you leave out that person and chose that one? You see this headman he chose his grandson or his son and why did he leave us out?' I want this to be done while everyone is here. Even if you go, we will know that this person was chosen and it should come from people's mouth. (Michael Gende during Mupapama community meeting April 12<sup>th</sup> 2012)

Only two young men raised their hands when Gende asked for volunteers to come forward. When we were told that both candidates were his grandsons, I tried to intervene, and asked for adults, and especially women, to volunteer, in an effort to establish a balanced production team. Gende, however, stopped my efforts, jokingly but unmistakably, thus enforcing the inclusion of his two grandsons into our team. Gende's strategy was intriguing: by employing arguments of democracy and transparency, he had managed to install his two kin in our production team rather autocratically. I was frustrated after the meeting, as we had failed to contrive a suitable strategy to achieve a balanced production team. At the same time, my local co-workers interpreted the events rather positively, as a sign of strong leadership and support. According to Mukuya and Sinkumba, the headman was highly valued within his community and his opinion was therefore respected as a directive for the consensual decision-making. In this way, Gende had let the community legitimise his own choice.

In the light of these experiences we hastily revised our strategy for the community meeting in Mashare on the following day. We decided not to seek a clear decision as to the film's focus, but rather to initiate a more open discussion about the possible focus, and then leave the actual decision to the production team later on. More importantly, we tried to exercise more control over the composition of our team, and at the same time to make the selection process more transparent. Inspired by an earlier conversation with a local politician, who had proposed using a secret election in order to bypass the traditional leaders' dominance, we decided to initiate a vote according to certain pre-defined parameters, and informed the headman of Mashare, Paulus Haididi, accordingly. The following morning around 25 persons attended the meeting, which, again, was a rather small number given the size of the village. The meeting took place next to the headman's household as was usual. Although the setting was very much similar to that of the previous meeting in Mupapama, the atmosphere was completely different. After the formalised beginning, Haididi remained largely in the background and did not participate in the discussion, while a few older community members argued in favour of the project. When it came to recruiting the workshop participants, I explained that we sought a good balance of different

age groups, gender, and social backgrounds and that we wanted to select one male and one female adult from Mashare. I invited everyone to volunteer, but made it clear that only two persons could be chosen by the community. The situation developed an interesting momentum, which made lengthy interpretations inadequate; Sinkumba and Mukuya therefore took over the moderation without further translation:

Rapha and Robert initiated a secret vote. The community picked up the idea rather enthusiastically and I took out the cardboard ballot box and the ballot papers I had prepared. It was decided that every attending person had two votes, one for a man and one for a woman, and everyone filled out their card and put it in the box, rather excitedly. The headman was observing the situation with obvious satisfaction. Apparently we had been lucky with our improvised strategy. (Field diary April 13<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Even though novel in the context of village meetings, the introduction of a secret vote as a decision-making tool was highly appreciated. About ten persons spontaneously volunteered for the two posts, but there were two clear winners of the elections, both of whom were closely affiliated with headman Haididi: his daughter, Angeline Simata, and his old family friend Johannes Mashare.<sup>84</sup> Despite the headman's completely passive behaviour throughout the meeting, as well as the democratic selection process, the community members had chosen candidates associated with Haididi. Again, Sinkumba interpreted their votes as a sign of respect, indicative of the headman's strong position within the community. This view is supported by Pröpper, who calls the traditional system of leadership authoritarian, and observes that "respect and certain sorts of symbolic behaviour are demanded and paid" (2009: 288). Despite very different political styles both headmen successfully installed their preferred candidates into our production team through the legitimising actions of the attending community members.

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<sup>84</sup> Johannes Mashare explained that he is not related to the headman, but "he is more like family" (Interview Johannes Mashare June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011). While some community members told us that Johannes Mashare had been asked by the headman to participate, Johannes himself explained that he was only informed that we were looking for volunteers together with some other more educated community members: "he encouraged us all to go the meeting, all of us who went to school" (Interview Johannes Mashare June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011).

In our effort to represent the different segments of village society, we decided to make economic prosperity the selection criterion for the following community meeting in Tjeye. Many of our interlocutors had told us that in the context of farming, lack of oxen was their main problem, since oxen are needed to plough the fields, as outlined in Chapter 5.2. Moreover, the ownership of cattle is an important indicator of economic wellbeing in the Kavango as surplus funds are preferably used to buy cattle. Cattle can thus be seen as “a sign of wealth stratification” (Pröpper 2009: 206). As most participants we had recruited so far did have access to oxen, at least through their extended families, we decided to encourage the selection of participants who did not own any cattle during the final community meeting. However, this last meeting in Tjeye never took place. In contrast to the situation in other villages, it had proved difficult to meet with the headwoman of Tjeye, Hausiku Theresia Mavandje, and it took a long time before we eventually succeeded in scheduling a community meeting with her. On the designated date, only a few villagers gathered and Mavandje wanted to call another meeting after a Sunday church service in order to mobilise a larger number of people. On the following Sunday, however, the headwoman was not present at the church, and none of the churchgoers knew about the meeting. When we called the headwoman on her mobile phone, she told us that she was unable to come and that we should just recruit two of the churchgoers.<sup>85</sup> As people had already started to leave after the service, we quickly introduced our project to some bystanders. A villager we had already met during our research, and who later became the protagonist of the fishing sequence, Mariane Muronga, served as a spokesperson and encouraged others to participate. It emerged that no one without access to cattle was present at the church. As our production workshop was scheduled to start on the following day, we invited the two volunteers – Muronga’s niece Clementine and her neighbour Veronica – into our team, although they were both from families with cattle. As we were later told, Veronica and Clementine were also closely affiliated with the headwoman.

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<sup>85</sup> Whereas I viewed the continuing difficulties with the headwoman of Tjeye as a sign of disinterest in our project, Sinkumba interpreted them as an indicator of the community’s lack of support of the headwoman. This might have been due to the fact that Mavandje had only been in office for a relatively short time. Moreover, she had been installed as a replacement for the previous headman by order of the *Hompa*, due to the former headman’s “Angolan” ancestry.

The ways in which we implemented our recruitment, and the ways in which powerful stakeholders appropriated them to serve their own ends, proved to be a big challenge for the project. Despite our continual efforts to readjust our strategy in order to select a balanced production team, most of our participants were either related or otherwise affiliated to the head(wo)men. Regardless of their actual social or economic status,<sup>86</sup> they could all be considered as privileged members of their villages. The resulting composition of our team, and our recruitment methods, led to resentment within the communities. According to the workshop participants, many villagers complained that they had neither been informed about our project nor about the upcoming community meetings and therefore did not have the chance to get involved. Some people even suspected that the head(wo)men withheld this information intentionally, in order to privilege their kin and friends. This experience clearly shows that the villagers perceived participation in our workshop as advantageous – the filmmaking was seen as a potential resource.

In this context, Peter Anton Zoetl suggests that “customers” of research and development projects “rarely see any direct benefit (for themselves) in the doing of anthropologists and social activists” and at least want to “benefit from the monetary by-products of scientific research or humanitarian action” (Zoetl 2012: 5). This view is only partially supported by my own experiences. Expectations of financial or other material benefits were certainly present within the communities in the Mashare Area, and seemed to contribute to the dissatisfaction of those community members who were not part of the workshop and thus felt excluded. However, while certain perceived advantages obviously played role in the participants’ decision to take part in the workshop, immediate financial compensation was clearly not their primary motivation:

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<sup>86</sup> While many people are closely related in these villages, due to endogamous marriage rules, biological relationship does not necessarily imply economic or other support. For example, the responsibility to support one’s daughter ends with her marriage: “It’s the responsibility of the husband not the father’s any more since she is married” (Interview Johannes Mashare June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011).



I am a person that likes to know and learn more things that I never knew before and that are happening in and around the village. So that I will be exposed to different things will help me in the future. (Interview with Johannes Mashare 1.6.2011)

Even the community here knows that I am a poor person in the community and my father passed away long time ago and my mother as well. And that's why I struggle to volunteer myself in any work because I know that God will give me something in the end to feed my family some day. (Interview with Christofine Zangata 2.6.2011)

My experience suggest a much broader notion of filmmaking as a resource, as will be outlined below. The contentious nature of access to filmmaking was anticipated by, amongst others, Terence Turner's (1992, 1991) observations that powerful actors tended to appropriate filmmaking in order to reinforce their positions within their community. While it would be almost impossible – not to mention offensive – to bypass the authority of traditional leaders in order to obtain a more balanced production team and thereby possibly prevent allegations of favouritism, it would still have been advisable and desirable that we invite as many people from as many segments of village society as possible to participate in the decision-making and recruitment process. The participants later suggested that we should have initiated the community meetings not only through the traditional leaders but also through their statutory counterparts, the respective *Village Development Committees* (see Chapter 5.2) and representatives of civil society. A more diverse mixture of participants within the production team might have been achieved by implementing the recruitment more transparently, and according to a carefully drafted matrix of selection criteria such as age, gender and social status, amongst others. While the various stakeholders of the project would probably always try to influence the selection process according to their own purposes, broader, more public and more transparent procedures would at least make powerful actors (including the researchers) more accountable.

Having argued for a broader access and a more transparent selection process with more precise selection criteria, our experience also illustrates that any strategy has to be continually adjusted to minimise the possibility of

appropriations and manipulations. Ironically, the only participant without oxen was eventually selected independently by Mukuya and Sinkumba in the village of Muroro. They met a woman on the evening directly before the workshop started, right outside the MITC, who was interested in our project. When the woman told them that she was the head of a household without access to oxen, Mukuya and Sinkumba decided to invite her to participate. Christofine Zangata turned out to be one of the most active and, in many ways, important members of the production team. This experience shows that the inclusion of participants at the discretion of the facilitators may be justified or even necessary under certain conditions. Given the fortuitous circumstances of the meeting, it also serves as a reminder that risk and chance (Rouch 2003) may prove to be as important as a transparent and well-defined strategy.

### **6.3. The Workshop: Decision-Making and Training**

I am sitting in our classroom while the participants are busy discussing the possible foci of their chosen topics in three groups. We told them that they should decide upon and elaborate one particular aspect or activity within their respective domains fieldwork, river or wild fruits, and then present it for discussion to the whole group. The concentrated and dense working atmosphere in the room impresses as much as the sincerity and respect with which the participants treat each other. Regardless of age, gender and family background, everybody is given the time and space to express him or herself. (Field diary April 20<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Regardless of the shortcomings during our selection process, we managed to assemble a highly motivated and constructive team: Samwel (19 years) and Thobias (22) from Mupapama, Angeline (27) and Johannes (39) from Mashare, Clementine (17) and Veronica (28) from Tjeye, and Christofine (43) from Muroro. While the group was far from being a representative sample of the population of the Mashare Area, it was even further from representing an elitist group. It was rather a collection of relatively young women and men who were all to some extent struggling to make a living, yet ready to invest their time and energy into making a film together.

Angeline was born in Muroro and raised in Mashare. When her mother, a school-teacher, died, Angeline moved to live with her grandfather, Paulus Haididi. She

quit school after Grade 10<sup>87</sup> because she was ill, and after her recovery started farming. At the time of the workshop, this single mother lived in her household close to the headman, making a living from farming, occasional employment and a small-scale trading business. Despite her kinship with the headman, Angeline saw herself as being in an economically and socially difficult situation. At the beginning of the workshop Angeline was rather timid and reserved, but became increasingly confident and played an important role in the production of the film's intro song.

Johannes completed secondary school in Rundu in 1996. Since then he had had a number of diverse occupations, such as conducting surveys for the government, and working as a taxi driver in Rundu and as a hotel receptionist in the South of Namibia. Mashare had taken over his father's household, where he was now living with his wife, his children, his father and two of his brother's children. Mashare was the most affluent participant of the workshop, due to his agricultural activities and a small *shebeen* he was running next to his household.<sup>88</sup> Mashare was a self-assured person who tended to dominate the discussions in the workshop.

Both Samwel and his cousin (mother's sister's son) Thobias grew up in Vhungu-Vhungu, a village situated between Mashare and Rundu. Since their primary education they had been living with their grandfather in Mupapama for extended periods of time. Samwel and Thobias finished Grade 12 in 2009 and had been looking for work since then. Both young men were rather outgoing characters and very active members of the production team.

The youngest participant, Clementine, was living with her mother, her siblings and her small child in Tjeye. At the time of the workshop, Clementine was still

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<sup>87</sup> Primary education in Namibia goes from Grade 1 to Grade 7. Secondary education goes from Grade 8 to Grade 12, which qualifies for tertiary education.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Pröpper suggested that Johannes Mashare was actually one of the wealthiest residents of Mashare village, owning roughly 70 cattle (personal communication 1.6.2012).

attending secondary school at Mashare.<sup>89</sup> At times she displayed rather adolescent behaviour, which some group members found difficult to deal with.

Veronica was born and raised in Tjeye. Since failing Grade 10, Veronica had stayed with her mother and her child in a household next to the headwoman of Tjeye, who was her mother's sister. Veronica had her own *Mahangu* field. She was a self-confident and active participant throughout the workshop.

Christofine was born and raised in Muroro. She quit school in Grade 8 and had three children as a teenager. After they separated, she had a relationship with another man and had three more children with him. After her second partner died, Christofine came back together with the father of her older children and they now lived together with three of her children at her household at Muroro. While other participants could rely on familial support, Christofine was bereaved of her parents and most of her siblings; her husband was sick and unable to work. Despite her difficult situation, Christofine was a well-respected and ambitious person in both her community and the workshop.

Even though most of the participants had not known each other before the workshop, it did not take long for all involved to develop mutual confidence and trust, which facilitated the group's remarkable style of interaction and decision-making. The various participants established certain roles or positions for themselves within the group. Due to their age and life experience, Johannes and Christofine were considered as "elders" and dominated the discussions in certain respects. Veronica and Angeline were less active in the discussions at times and had to be motivated to participate by the facilitators and/or other members of the group. The other participants considered Clementine, Samwel and Thobias as youths, since they had not yet established their own households and were living with their families. Despite their young age, Samwel and Thobias were very active members of the group, possibly due to their upbringing in the headman's household and their higher level of education relative to the other participants. By

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<sup>89</sup> Most of the workshop took place during the school holidays, but for a number of days she was excused from her classes in order to attend the training.

far the youngest participant, Clementine was rather shy and moody and other participants or the facilitators had to work to integrate her into the workshop.

The decision-making processes throughout the workshop were based on a combination of consensual decision-making typical for the Kavango, and more democratic methods such as votes and elections introduced by the team of facilitators. The participants would usually start by presenting and discussing different perspectives and standpoints, until they reached a solution that was supportable for the entire group. If an agreement could not be reached within a reasonable amount of time, they would readily adapt to using alternative methods of reasoning, evaluating and decision-making proposed by the facilitators, such as rankings or majority votes. All the participants emphasised that the respectful communication during the workshop, especially between members of different generations, was an outstanding experience for them:

I am happy that the group accepted me despite our age differences. I felt like I was in their age and they were not afraid to advise me because I was older and they were not intimidated by me. We all got really along well and I was included in their conversations. (Interview with Christofine Zangata June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012)

Even those that were talking a lot, they might talk something, which is not liked by the group, and it will be rejected. It's not like everything they say goes, the group has to decide on what is good and what not. (Interview with Veronica Kapumburu June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

The management of the MITC had assigned a small conference room to us for the entire duration of the workshop. The room was equipped with chairs and tables as well as a flip-chart. As TFO had provided a video projector, a laptop computer and two camcorders with assorted accessories, we were able to turn the well-equipped room into a studio and screening room ideally suited to our purposes.<sup>90</sup> We usually worked from 8:00 to 12:00 and from 13:00 to 17:00 with a one-hour lunch break in between. Each morning, one of my co-workers picked

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<sup>90</sup> We used a Canon XF 100 HD camcorder for shooting and a Canon XM 2 mini DV camcorder for training and as a backup. Sound was recorded externally, mostly with a Sennheiser directional microphone and a boom. The editing was done with an Apple MacBook Pro computer and Final Cut Pro editing software.

up the participants by car from their respective households, while my other colleague and I prepared the workshop and set up the equipment for the day. After the workshop we dropped the participants back at their respective villages.<sup>91</sup>



Figure 23: Workshop situation

The first week of the production workshop, from 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2011, was dedicated to the film's conception and to practical training in filmmaking. We scheduled the conceptual work for the morning sessions and held the hands-on training in the afternoons. All the practical lessons were based on peer-to-peer tutoring and group work – intended to allow the participants to teach each other and acquire new skills on their own. This strategy was adopted to blur the boundaries between facilitators and participants as well as to transfer responsibility to the participants. On the first day Sinkumba and I introduced the various components and features of the camera. In a peer-to-peer exercise, each participant would first receive the relevant instruction in the camera's functions and usage; he or she would then experiment with using the camera

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<sup>91</sup> While we were staying at the MITC during the first week of our workshop, we later commuted from Rundu, since the accommodation was booked out.

directly by filming short statements made by one of their peers, and would finally go on to provide instruction for the next participant.



Figure 24: Raphael Sinkumba explains the camera

On the following day, we continued the training with interview exercises. We divided the group into small teams and asked the participants to develop questions related to natural resources. The participants subsequently conducted interviews, alternating their roles between that of camera-operator and interviewee. The idea was not only to introduce them to filmic practice, but also to let them experience the process of filming from both perspectives. At the end of the first week, the participants filmed short observational film sequences. In order to establish an “authentic” filming situation, we asked them to arrange to film a resource-related activity with a neighbour or friend. While the first group filmed the cracking of *Manketti* nuts with an old woman in Mupapama, the second group filmed Clementine’s aunt, Mariane Muronga, harvesting *Mahangu*. The camera training introduced the participants to the basic functions of a camcorder and only provided them with a minimum of filming skills. Moreover, I introduced the participants to the basics of continuity editing, especially to the importance of filming shots with different sizes and from different positions. The

participants were eager to learn how to operate a camera and it was remarkable to see how individuals with no previous experience<sup>92</sup> and little media literacy rapidly appropriated the technology for themselves. An important aspect of this training was the use of regular feedback sessions, during which first the participants and then the facilitators commented on the resulting material. The practical components were an important and motivating aspect of the workshop from the beginning.

The conception of the film was facilitated through various methods such as brainstorming, group discussions, presentations, sorting and voting. As it had been decided that the participants should determine the film's focus, we started an open-ended discussion with a brainstorming session centred around the following questions:

- What is most interesting to you?
- What is most disturbing to you?
- What would you tell an outsider?

Our questions were aimed at eliciting responses that would indicate the environmental issues that the participants found most important. We therefore asked the participants to keep in mind that the film was meant to communicate their views to project members and villagers in the other project countries, as laid out in the project proposal. In marked contrast to the discussions during community meetings, which had been rather general and almost exclusively revolved around the subjects of farming and the river, the participants named a great variety of different phenomena, and came up with rather detailed questions, such as: Why do certain berries only grow every second year? Why do some crops not grow properly in certain places? How is farming changing? (field diary April 18<sup>th</sup> 2011). As many of these remarks were related to agricultural problems or linked to expert knowledge, I had the impression that

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<sup>92</sup> None of the participants owned a video- or photo-camera and only Johannes Mashare had once owned an analogue photo camera a few years previously. While all participants had mobile phones, none of them had a camera function.



some of the participants had a more educational film in mind – possibly inspired by the sporadic viewing of didactic TV documentaries.<sup>93</sup> Following the ideas of participatory research and filmmaking, I emphasised that the film should depict local perspectives and local knowledge rather than statements from the outside. The results of the brainstorming session were written down on flip-chart papers to be evaluated on the following day.

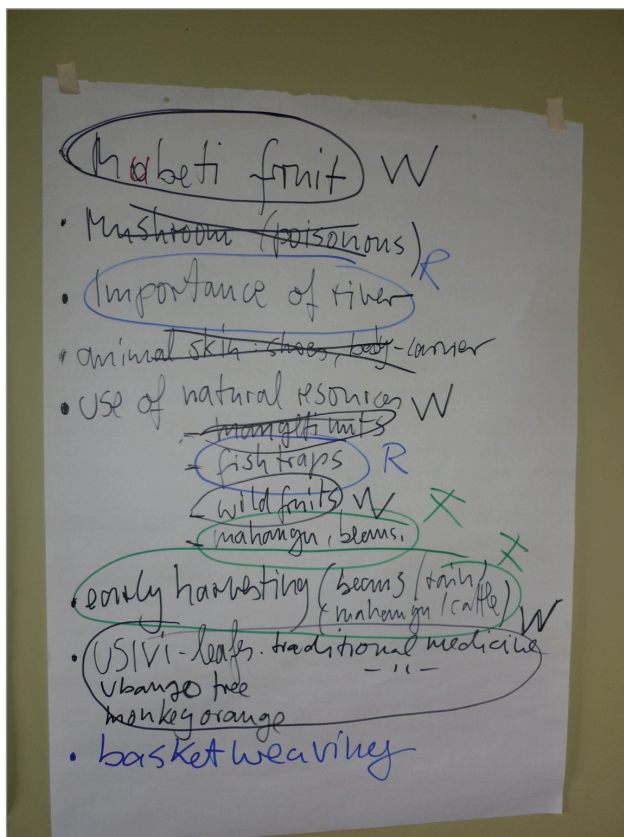


Figure 25: Brainstorming session on film topic

On the following day, we assigned the participants' ideas to certain categories as a means by which to focus our selection process. In addition to the domains of farming and river resources, the brainstorming had generated a considerable number of comments related to wild fruits and medicinal plants, leading to an intensive discussion as to whether we should assign these issues to two different categories or a single one. The group eventually decided on one broad category

<sup>93</sup> Johannes Mashare was the only participant who owned a TV and who watched television on a daily basis. The other participants visited family or friends in order to watch television at between "several times a week" and very rarely. Some of them mentioned that they had seen nature documentaries on the TV.

labelled “wild fruits”, on the grounds that the various parts of the same plant are often used for medicinal, food or other purposes. In addition to some points that could not be assigned to any category, the issue of bush fires had been mentioned twice, but was immediately discarded as a possible film focus since the group felt that fire had been the topic of too many recent awareness campaigns in the area.<sup>94</sup> As outlined above, I argued that within the given time limit, the choices of a single subject film would allow a deeper discussion and the juxtaposition of different (and possibly even opposing) viewpoints, while several foci might result in certain overall superficiality. Significantly, despite my advice, the group never considered focusing on a single topic. Instead, they discussed whether the film should only be about farming and river-resources, or whether wild fruits should also be included. After a lengthy discussion with no clear result, in order to facilitate the decision-making process I suggested that every participant should name the topic he or she would personally most like to focus on. Surprisingly, three out of the seven participants chose wild fruits as their preferred topic. This new perspective had convincingly solved the question for everyone: the film would introduce all three areas of resource use. The decision shifted the film’s focus to the importance of a combination of natural resources in local people’s livelihoods.

Writing is widely regarded as unfavourable, for participatory processes, when working with illiterate people. It is therefore a central aspect of PRA to work with visualisations such as drawing and mapping (see Chambers 1994). During our workshop the situation was more complex, as most of the participants had some writing knowledge in one of the local languages, and/or English, whereas the workshop communication had to be translated for me to be able to facilitate the process. While Mukuya and Sinkumba led the discussions I kept notes on the flip charts. These codifications were, however, the result of a lengthy process of discussion, negotiation and translation, in which the participants clarified the exact meaning or content of the points and topics they had mentioned. Translations and note-taking were thus descriptive and interpretive tools that

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<sup>94</sup> Bush fires are a major environmental problem in Namibia, with enormous amounts of vegetation destroyed every year (see Kazondovi 2012).

enhanced the discussion, helped to narrow the different mentions and make them comprehensible to an outsider, as was envisaged in the resulting film.

The facilitation team decided to split the group into three teams, each responsible for the production of one of the chosen topics. Within each group the participants were free to distribute the various tasks such as recruiting the protagonists, operating the camera and posing interview questions. However, the participants noticed that their initial division, on the basis of their personal interests alone, resulted in teams consisting of representatives from the same villages. Without the facilitators' intervention, they decided that they would prefer to work together with participants from other villages, and therefore chose to establish more generally diverse production teams. After extensive discussions they succeeded in setting up teams including representatives of different villages, age groups and gender: Thobias and Angeline were to be responsible for covering the subject of farming, Johannes and Clementine for that of the river, and Christofine, Veronica and Samwel for the wild fruit sequence. The participants further decided to film each sequence in a different one of the three villages of Tjeye, Mashare and Mupapama in order to represent the entire Mashare Area.

As an assignment over the Easter holidays the participants were asked to develop and organise the filming. Amongst other tasks, they had to recruit protagonists, elaborate on the activities on which their filming was to be based and how exactly they intended to film them. In the first workshop session after the Easter break, on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011, the groups reported on their activities and the current states of their projects. While the organisation of the filming was still underway, each group had prepared questions they wanted to ask their protagonists, which were presented and discussed during the workshop, resulting in a questionnaire that would serve as a guideline during the filming. During the session, the group made two important conceptual decisions. The first of these was related to a discussion of the various possibilities for conveying relevant contextual information, for example through the use of text titles and different forms of audio commentary. After a lengthy discussion, the participants decided that one of them should speak a voice-over commentary, the content of

which was to be developed by the entire group. Christofine Zangata was spontaneously asked by a number of participants if she would be prepared to do the speaking. She was reluctant at first, but finally agreed.

The second conceptual decision was that the participants decided to include interviews with outsiders in the film:

When I asked the participants if they ... wanted to ask some outsiders relevant questions for the film or if such an appearance would make the film better, there was immediate positive feedback. Johannes said that he would like to ask an agricultural extension officer some question about farming and Christofine proposed to ask the Councillor of Mashare about help from the Government. (Field diary May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

As the question whether additional stakeholders should be included into the film (as was favoured by Thomas Falk) was still pending, I raised the issue during the workshop. It was picked up enthusiastically, and in the subsequent discussion, the participants decided to interview the Councillor of Mashare, as well as representatives of the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Ministry of Fisheries. I suggested the inclusion of Dorothy Wamunyima of the Namibia Nature Foundation, both to counterbalance this selection of government representatives, and because she was one of TFO's important local partners.

We agreed that the workshop participants would devise the questions, conduct the interviews and do the filming, while the facilitators would make appointments with the selected interviewees. In order to devise interview questions, we split the workshop participants into two groups, each moderated by one of the co-workers, and collected the questions they wanted to ask their interviewees. While the participants came up with a great number of questions many of them had little or nothing to do with the topic of the film, but were rather concerned with jobs and other benefits for the villagers. I intervened, and asked the participants to select questions related to the film's overall topic.<sup>95</sup> The group agreed and the results of the subsequent discussion were put in writing by

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<sup>95</sup> Both, the results of the brainstorming and the finalised questionnaires can be viewed in the appendix.

Raphael Sinkumba, to be used by the participants during the interviews. While it was clearly the participants' own choice to conduct these interviews for the film, it has to be acknowledged that the idea of doing so was triggered by my initiative – even though I asked them about their opinion as neutrally and unsuggestively as possible. This was confirmed during an interview I conducted with one of the participants, and highlights the powerful position I had as a workshop convenor:

Martin: For me the expert interviews were never important. It was your [the participants'] decision.

Samwel: Because you gave us the idea to ask the experts. And when you asked us, we thought it was interesting for you and we decided to ask the experts. Before you brought it up, we never thought of asking the experts. (Interview with Thobias Immanuel and Samwel Kwandu May 31<sup>st</sup> 2011)

The film's introduction was conceived and shot at the very end of the project. Even though everybody was very tired from the long and intensive work, the participants' interest rose dramatically when we started discussing the film's opening. The group immediately and unanimously decided to be visually present in the film, resulting in the idea that they would briefly introduce themselves, giving their names, places of residence and a brief account of their resource use. Being visually present in the film was perceived as meaningful and potentially advantageous, as suggested by Louise Waite and Cath Conn (2011; see also Turner 1992: 6; 11). The participants created a visual trace which can be seen as evidence that confirmed their connection to the film. This was reinforced through their decision to perform the film's introductory song. The idea of combining their introduction with music was brought up by one of the participants and triggered an unprecedented momentum, as an excerpt from my field diary elucidates:

Samwel proposed to include some music and there were quite a few other participants who seemed to also like the idea. When I asked them to be more concrete and think about a certain piece and about someone to perform it for the film, a long and never-ending discussion started. After a while, I proposed that they should perform themselves. This idea was enthusiastically picked up by

some group members and Robert, who motivated and pushed the people to develop this idea further. (Field Diary May 20<sup>th</sup> 2011)

As Samwel and Thobias had filmed each other posing as rap singers during the film exercises, I proposed that they should compose a rap song dealing with resource use. My idea was turned down, because the majority within the group considered a local or “traditional” song more appropriate. In the following days, the group met to re-write and rehearse different songs under Robert Mukuya’s supervision. Throughout the entire workshop, they never displayed such self-initiative and excitement as was evident during the song. Based on their taste and style of self-presentation, this format gave the participants the opportunity to perform according to their own preferences. Importantly, the implementation of the sequence overrode existing roles and hierarchies within the group: Angeline, who had been rather quiet throughout the workshop, took a leading role in devising and performing the song and acted as the lead singer.

The main task of this conceptual phase of the film workshop had been to teach the participants some practical filmmaking skills, to determine the topic and to devise a concrete plan for filming. The participants were able to shape and plan the product within certain limitations, and made important decisions, even against my preferences. While the consensual decision-making processes common in participatory workshops are often portrayed negatively as overriding minority perspectives (Cooke & Kothari 2004a), the workshop participants themselves were eager to find decisions that would be supported by the entire group. Consequently, even the less active members felt respected and adequately represented, as emerges from the following interview extract:

Martin: Within the group of participants, how do you see your position?

Angeline: It was good.

Martin: Do you think in the group there were people who took more responsibility than others?

Angeline: No we all took responsibility and we were all deciding on things before it’s written down. (Interview with Angeline Simata June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011)

The interaction within the group was remarkable and characterised by great respect and openness, regardless of differences such as age, gender, and social

and cultural backgrounds. Raphael Sinkumba and Robert Mukuya played a major role in the facilitation of these processes as moderators and practical trainers. While most of the workshop participants seemed to interact with and relate to me in a friendly and relaxed way, I was aware that our interaction was also shaped by projections of my role as a white, male, foreign “expert”, especially in a county in which racism is such an integral aspect of daily life. The participants certainly felt less intimidated by the Namibian facilitators, who came from similar backgrounds. At times I therefore stepped back completely while Mukuya and Sinkumba facilitated the workshop without providing any translation, either together or one at a time. Mukuya’s and Sinkumba’s presence thus changed the atmosphere and the interaction within the workshop and led to a blurring of the conventional roles and hierarchies. Shifting the responsibility to the co-workers was an important participatory element that was only made possible by their level of experience and existing skills. To implement participatory filmmaking without such experienced local assistants is a challenge that is yet to be faced in the process of making subsequent films to be produced in Angola and Botswana.

#### **6.4. The Production: Participatory Filming and Editing**

The shooting turned out to be a veritable teamwork between the different members of our production team with very different roles. From the beginning, Thobias was the more active part both with the camera and with talking, while Angeline remained rather passive. Although we asked her several times to take over ... the camera, it never remained with her for very long. While I suggested making a number of establishing shots at the beginning, I remained passive during the observational shooting. At this point Rapha was very closely monitoring Thobias’ hand-held camera work and constantly made suggestions and small corrections regarding the composition. Angeline was following the two while Robert operated the second camera to document the shoot. (Field diary May 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)

The outcome of the filming described above is one of the film’s most impressive sequences. The images and sound of the *Mahangu* harvesting, recorded through a remarkable hand-held tracking shot, capture this core aspect of Kavango daily life in both its monotony and beauty. Thobias proved to be not only a highly

talented cameraman but also a gifted interviewer. The unpretentious and laconic way he questioned his protagonist elicited some compelling and extremely interesting statements. During our village screenings, audiences were particularly mesmerised during this part of the film. Thobias' team partner Angeline had recruited members of her extended family to act as the protagonists.

We did not have the time to discuss filmic narrative in detail within the context of the production workshop. The participants wanted to show the activities of their protagonists and ask them questions. This corresponded perfectly with an observational approach – one of the hallmarks of ethnographic filmmaking. While I had hoped that my work for TFO would also allow me to pursue my interest in re-enactments and ethnofictional filmmaking, I did not want to impose this personal interest upon the participants and therefore did not propose introducing a fictional framework. However, the way in which the participants arranged the shooting with the protagonists involved a certain degree of staging or re-enacting, which had some parallels with ethnofictional filmmaking, as I will describe later in this chapter. As most of my previous films were based on continuity editing, I had given the participants a basic introduction to the ideas involved, and asked them to film the various steps of the respective activities using varying shot sizes – preferably by varying the camera's proximity to the protagonists.<sup>96</sup> The only piece of film we watched during the entire workshop was a ten-minute long sequence of the felling and processing of a tree in *Wiza Wetu*. While we usually discussed narrative and editing with reference to the footage generated by the workshop participants themselves, I had spontaneously decided to screen the extract in order to discuss the compression of time through editing, which had been difficult to explain otherwise.

The shooting of the film's three core sequences took place from May 3<sup>rd</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> 2011. Each team was granted a maximum of one and a half days to film the material for their sequence, and the entire group met occasionally in order to

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<sup>96</sup> We asked the participants to avoid zooming since many people with no previous filming experience are fascinated by this device and "spoil" their footage by continually zooming in and out.



discuss the filming experience and the resulting footage. The facilitators accompanied the shooting teams to provide technical and directorial support. I largely refrained from asking for detailed translations during the shoots in order to shift the responsibility to the Namibian co-workers and participants. While the participants would set up the equipment, operate the camera and communicate with the protagonists, Sinkumba would check the camera settings and supervise their shooting in terms of framing and editability. During the filming, one of the facilitators would sometimes propose an alternative camera angle or ask an interview question. Filming was mostly, though not exclusively, done from a tripod so the participants were able to concentrate on the framing and the interaction with the protagonists rather than on holding the camera steady. Some of the participants turned out to be very talented and filmed outstanding material; others were more insecure and needed a certain amount of support and guidance. They were all eager to operate the camera or direct the shoot, confirming the importance of the act of filming itself (see Turner 1992; Flores 2004). As none of the participants was interested in operating the microphone boom, either Robert Mukuya or I took care of the sound recording.

Angeline and Thobias, comprising the *Mahangu* team started filming on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2011. Angeline had made an appointment with her aunt, Francisca Kapande, who lived just across from headman Haididi in Mashare. Due to the unusually early rains in 2011, the family had been forced to harvest most of their *Mahangu* shortly before the filming began, but had left a part of the field untouched for our activities. Upon our arrival, the team conducted a short briefing with Francisca Kapande and her husband, and then started by filming the harvesting of *Mahangu* on the adjacent field. The couple carried out the activities with little direct interaction with the filmmakers. Thobias followed most of the action through hand-held shots in an observational approach. The participants then decided to ask Francisca Kapande some questions connected to the growing of *Mahangu* directly on the field, while her husband continued to work in the background. After a short break, we continued the interview inside the homestead, with Angeline operating the camera and Thobias asking most of the questions.

The second team, Johannes and Clementine, filmed Mariane Muronga, demonstrating her *Yintunga* fish-traps. The three of them had devised a detailed shooting plan a few days prior to the filming: they first wanted to film the manufacturing of a *Yintunga* and then document its use, arguing that these two activities belonged together.<sup>97</sup> When we arrived at Mariane Muronga's household at the scheduled time, our protagonist had already collected the necessary materials and started to weave the trap. As the participants wanted to cover the entire process, I proposed that she re-enact the missing steps. This was implemented with great casualness. The participants decided to film Mariane Muronga leaving her household, walking through her field to a cluster of shrubs and picking the necessary twigs. She then used these materials to complete the unfinished *Yintunga* that she had already started to manufacture. Both the protagonist and the participants demonstrated a high level of abstraction and a remarkable facility for improvisation and play, something I had already experienced during my previous filmmaking in the Kavango. While Mariane Muronga clearly demonstrated her activities for the filming, she did not acknowledge the camera at this time. This resulted in a certain impression of staging, which was reinforced by a rather theatrical style of shooting: The filmmakers did not follow the action through a hand-held camera, but often filmed using a tripod from a distance, as if the action was taking place on a stage. On the following day, the interaction between filmmakers and protagonist shifted radically during Mariane Muronga's performance of a fishing ritual, which she seemed to act out with a combination of anxiety and enjoyment (Chapter 5.3.4). It was obvious that her later, more outgoing and intentional acting corresponded much more to Mariane Muronga's personal style of self-presentation. The performance of the fishing ritual might have played a catalytic role in this shift from performing "virtually" to a more conscious and expressive form acting as described by Johannes Sjöberg (2008: 238f).

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<sup>97</sup> The entirety of the material documenting the manufacture of the fish-trap had to be omitted during the editing in order to fit into the designated time slot of the sequence.



Figure 26: Filming of the fishing sequence

The filming of the third resource sequence, depicting the collecting and processing of *Manketti* nuts, started with a setback. Upon our arrival in Mupapama on the morning of May 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, Samwel, who had organised the shoot, told us that the protagonists he had recruited had withdrawn from the project without further explanation. Even though this possibility had been looming for a few days and Christofine had already negotiated with some alternative protagonists in her village, Muroro, I perceived this as a serious problem. Filming each sequence in a different village presided over by a head(wo)man had been an integral part of the film's concept. I was troubled that the headman or other elders from Mupapama might withdraw their support for the project if their village was not represented.<sup>98</sup> The participants and my local co-workers shared my concerns, but we eventually decided to take up Christofine's offer and drove to Muroro for the filming.

Due to these short-notice changes, both the filmmakers and the protagonists of the *Manketti* sequence, Siwana Nekongo and Stephanus Ihemba, were ill-

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<sup>98</sup> These concerns were allayed during the later village screening and by the headman's positive reactions to the film.

prepared, necessitating a great deal of improvisation during the shoot. Directed by Christofine and shot by Samwel and Veronica, the team decided to focus on the preparation of *Ehayi* puree as described in Chapter 5.3.2. The group started their filming with Siwana Nekongo pounding *Manketti* nuts in a big wooden mortar in the family's compound.



Figure 27: Filming the *Manketti* sequence

When she continued her preparations inside the kitchen building, the camera was first positioned in the hut's entrance and Christofine directed the sequence by asking a number of questions from outside the structure. Siwana Nekongo seemed uneasy, giving extremely short answers. The awkward filming situation, with her inside the kitchen and the filmmakers outside, was certainly not conducive to easing her insecurity. In order to make the situation more relaxed I proposed that Christofine engage in a conversation with Siwana Nekongo on camera rather than asking the questions from off-camera. We had successfully experimented with such a method during one of our shooting exercises in order to ease Christofine's own insecurity as an interviewer. Christofine was happy to enter the stage and the two women developed an increasingly lively and amicable discussion.

Following realist documentary conventions, Christofine's presence in the scene made it necessary to establish her filmically as a protagonist. After the filming of the *Ehayi* preparation, I therefore proposed that Christofine might improvise a self-introduction in which she positioned herself as a community researcher (03:01-03:45). During the following conceptual discussion, the participants argued that the sequence should include the collection and cracking of the nuts in order to depict the entire process. Stephanus Ihemba spontaneously chose to perform these activities, usually carried out by women – evidently because he perceived it as meaningful or potentially advantageous to participate in the film. To volunteer to appear on film acting against cultural conventions regarding the gendered division of labour can be seen as an indication of great interest. This resulted in a somewhat awkward performance of an activity with which the protagonist was obviously not acquainted. It was difficult to edit this process without making Stephanus Ihemba appear clumsy and even slightly ridiculous. Of all the scenes filmed, the *Manketti* sequence generally required the greatest amount of improvisation and negotiation during the shoot – as well as creative construction during the editing.

The interaction between filmmakers and protagonists varied greatly during the filming of all of the resource sequences. It became a central aspect of their narratives, resulting in the on-camera dialogue between Christofine and Siwana Nekongo, through Tobias Immanuel's off-camera questions, which resulted in a rather formalistic interview, to Mariane Muronga's outgoing self-presentation in the fishing sequence. The fact that the protagonists were filmed by their peers, rather than by professional filmmakers, certainly made the situation less hierarchical, blurring boundaries between participants, protagonists and facilitators (see Kindon 2003). Their negotiations and experimentation during the filming constituted a unique filmic space in which the protagonists performed and played together with the filmmakers, as suggested by the approach of ethnofictional filmmaking (Sjöberg 2008). Despite the facilitators' continual input and supervision, the participants clearly perceived themselves as the makers of the film. The filming of the resource sequences was certainly one of the most



interesting and dynamic aspects of the workshop, which is reflected in the participants' evaluation of that aspect:

Thobias: Personally filming was most interesting to me and now I know how to film.

Samwel: And me also, filming. Now I know what is going on when I watch a movie. I will know what happened and I will identify if the camera was shaking. (Interview with Thobias Immanuel and Samwel Kwandu May 31<sup>st</sup> 2011)

The “expert” interviews were filmed between May 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011, when we were already in the process of editing the resource sequences. Although most of our interviewees were based in Rundu, we asked them to come to the Mashare Area for filming, in order to link the interviews visually to our research as well as to situate them within the social space of the participants, rather than in the urban environment (see Flores 2009: 216). Whereas the Councillor and the Agricultural Extension Officer preferred to be filmed at their offices at Muroro and the MITC respectively, Dorothy Wamunyima and the two officers from the Fisheries Department agreed to be filmed on the banks of the Kavango. My idea of constructing the filmic events as conversations rather than as formal interviews, in order to better reveal the constructed nature of the pro-filmic event, could not be realised, as our interviewees were extremely busy and we had to rush through the shooting. Filming the arranged conversation with changing camera perspectives was not feasible in such a situation. The interviews were thus filmed in a rather conventional way, with questions asked by the participants from off-camera. The outcome of these interviews developed in two different directions: Dorothy Wamunyima and Councillor Wakudumo, rather than answering the questions they were asked in a straightforward manner, instead made more general statements that underlined their own achievements. The agricultural extension officer and the two representatives of the Department of Fisheries, on the other hand, answered the participants' questions precisely and, in the latter case, in great detail.

The filming of the expert interviews constituted new and unknown territory resulting in insecurity and irritation on both sides of the camera. Most participants

were rather anxious and read the questions from their questionnaires hastily.<sup>99</sup> The interviewees, on the other hand, who were for the most part used to presenting themselves publicly, dealt with the situation in various different ways. Councillor Wakudumo knew some of the participants, since he came from the area, and treated them in a friendly but somewhat paternalistic manner. The agricultural extension officer was assigned to participate in the filming on a very short notice and appeared nervous himself. He gave extremely short answers and seemed to be glad when the interview was over. The Fisheries officers knew some of the participants from their law-enforcement activities in the area. This led to the awkward situation in which they were interviewed by individuals that they had questioned as suspects only a few weeks earlier. Irrespective of the varied reactions to the experience, the filming of these interviews constituted a reversal of the usual roles and power relations, which culminated in the editing as described below.

On the day that we conducted the interviews with the Fisheries officers, we also filmed the Kavango River song and the short personal introductions by the participants on the banks of the river. The rehearsal and performance of the song were amongst the most exciting aspects of the workshop for both the workshop members and the facilitators. The participants filmed each other for the self-introductions. Rather appropriately, this last filming task was almost an exact repetition of the first filming exercise of the very first day of the workshop. The participants radiate confidence and quiet self-possession in these clips – which can almost be seen as a visual indication of their positive experiences and sense of achievement with their experiences in the workshop.

Editing is another central aspect of filmmaking, since narrative and meaning is constructed through this process. Highly complex both conceptually and technically, the process of editing is time-consuming, and, as might be expected, the time required usually increases with the film's duration.<sup>100</sup> As our schedule only left us with two weeks (from May 17<sup>th</sup> until May 31<sup>st</sup> 2011), for the entire

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<sup>99</sup> The participants with the best reading skills were chosen to pose the interview questions, either in English or in Rukwangali, depending on the respective interviewee.

<sup>100</sup> This was one of the reasons why I wanted to limit the film's duration to 30 minutes.

post-production, including the editing, subtitling and recording of the voice-over narrations, it was impossible to teach the participants how to edit the film themselves. Nevertheless I wanted to give them as much editorial control as possible. While Raphael Sinkumba and I thus did the initial editing based on our previously established routine, we organised regular feedback screenings during which we discussed the rough cut with the participants. Their comments and instructions were then taken into account in the further editing process.



Figure 28: Post-production in Rundu

Before we started the editing I gave the participants a brief introduction outlining its technical and conceptual aspects. We discussed how their choices would impact on the film's potential interpretations and on its perceived focus. As the production team had agreed during the film's conception that the film's main body would consist of three sequences each depicting the use of a different resource, Sinkumba and I started by assembling the observational footage of the respective activities in chronological order. In a second step, we viewed the dialogues and interviews that formed part of this material and extracted certain statements, leaving out repetitions and incomprehensible parts. When we screened these rough cuts to the participants there was surprisingly little debate



about the observational scenes, as the participants found that they represented the pro-filmic events adequately. However, our question about the relevance of various statements prompted intense discussions. When the participants could not reach a consensual decision on which ones to include into the film, the facilitators proposed a vote, the manner of which was discussed and agreed upon together with the participants.

Starting with the *Mahangu* sequence, each participant was given two votes for themes to be included and two votes for clips to be left out. The result was rather clear: the group selected the improvement of soil quality, issues of sowing, and the differences between “traditional” and genetically modified *Mahangu* as the most important topics. Other issues, such as the storing of *Mahangu* or information about a certain type of weed, were perceived as less important and consequently left out. In agreement with the participants we decided to use the same method to determine the content for the fishing and *Manketti* sequences. Following the resulting directions, Sinkumba and I then completed the resource sequences, by combining the dialogues and interview statements with the observational parts. In consultation with the participants, the three self-contained stories were put together in an order that made sense dramaturgically: first the *Manketti* sequence with Christofine’s introduction, then the *Mahangu* sequence, which seemed to be the most profound part of the film, and lastly the fishing sequence, intended as a dynamic and entertaining ending.

As we did not want to break the sense of relatedness and flow that linked the resource sequences, we decided to edit a single sequence of expert statements to appear at the end of the film. Applying the same selection process as during the resource sequences, Sinkumba and I pre-selected interview extracts to present for discussion and subsequent vote. The Councillor’s statements were discussed controversially, mostly along the lines of party support. While SWAPO supporters wanted to give him considerable space in the film, his opponents perceived his statements as partisan and wanted to keep his presence rather limited. The interviews with the Fisheries Department’s representatives were unanimously perceived as highly relevant for local viewers and consequently assigned considerable time. Most of the participants also regarded Dorothy

Wamunyima's statements as meaningful, and could relate directly to her positive presentation of the Kavango. The participants also decided to include a short extract from their interview with the agricultural extension officer into the film. Even though it did not contain any information perceived as new, they agreed that it would be impolite to leave him out completely, and so they selected the segment they found most meaningful. When we realised that the information communicated was paralleled by an earlier statement made by Francisca Kapande, the workshop participants agreed that this would emphasise the veracity of the farmers' knowledge. Moreover, it was decided to include an extract from the interview with Sebastian Kantema that we had conducted during the pre-workshop investigation. To exclude a high-ranking civil servant from the film was perceived as inappropriate and possibly unfavourable for the overall project.<sup>101</sup>

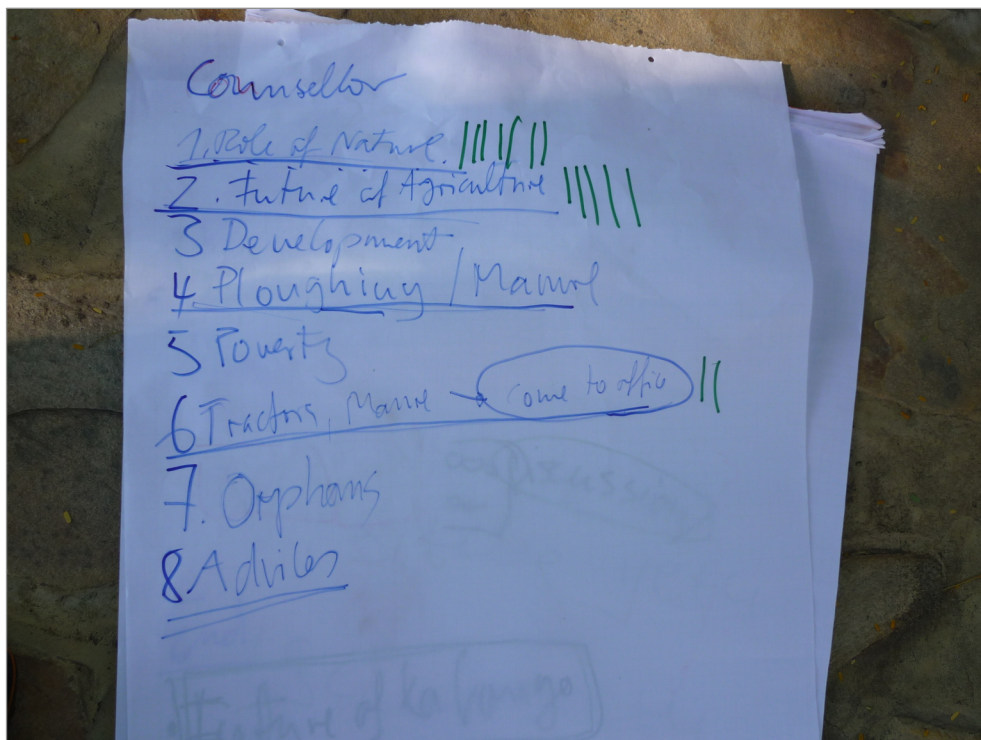


Figure 29: Selecting interview questions for the councillor

<sup>101</sup>This example illustrates the possible consequences of such inconsiderate decision on the outcome of the project. The selected clip remains the only part of the film not generated during the production workshop.

We spent two days discussing these interviews. Divided into small fragments and viewed out of context, the statements lost their authority. This was reinforced by playing them in fast and slow motion, which resulted in awkward movements and strange sounds. The collective process of watching, analysing, marking, commenting on, laughing about, and finally selecting the “right” interview extracts for the film resulted in a complete demystification of the so-called experts amongst the participants. The discussions and activities that centred on these interviews were in opposition to existing hierarchies and dominant discourses to a greater extent than those related to any other part of the film, constituting what geographer Mike Kesby (2005) calls an “empowering performance”.

The participants were confident and proud to present the local authority figures in their film, and perceived their presence as a valorisation of the entire project. This was reinforced by Christofine Zangata’s improvised comments framing this sequence. On the contrary, I found the interviews cinematically unappealing and was concerned that their presence might overpower the images of the land-users and reinforce false perceptions of “knowledgeable experts” versus “uninformed villagers” amongst local viewers. As such a reading would go directly against the aim of the film, I proposed to the participants that they shorten or leave out the interviews. Despite my suggestions, they insisted on keeping the interview sequence as they had selected it. According to Raphael Sinkumba, basing his interpretations on the overtones and nuances he had discerned during the related discussions, the fact that the participants eventually succeeded in having it their way – against my declared concerns – essentially gave them the feeling that it was their film, rather than mine.

That's also one thing that makes them [the participants] feel that they are the owners. You could see the way that they were deciding that no changes should be made. Because they liked it the way it is. It gives them the sense of ownership. Because they could see that they can decide on something that they want and they get it. (Interview with Raphael Sinkumba June 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Whereas I had expected the editing process to be difficult due to having to negotiate differences *within* the group of participants, the main conflict actually took place between the participants and myself – and became a crucial moment

in the workshop. According to Sinkumba's interpretation, the conflict and the manner of its resolution were important since they compounded the participants' sense of ownership. The expert interview sequence exemplifies some of the complexities and contradictions connected with participatory filmmaking. Firstly, it illustrates the power of facilitators to induce certain decisions, or more generally to influence and shape the process, be it consciously or unconsciously. Secondly, it shows how the facilitator's authority can be challenged and lead to a reversal of hierarchies within the production team. Thirdly, it illustrates the paradoxical situation that, though decision-making processes and the resultant activities may indeed be "empowering" (Kesby 2005) in themselves, the inclusion of the resulting material into the film may reinforce established underlying power structures and discourses. Process and product may have opposing effects. As film's openness to interpretation makes it difficult to foresee the audience's reading of a film, moderated screenings may be a way to guide audience interpretations (Stadler 2003).

## **6.5. After the Making: Participant and Audience Reactions**

Watching the screenings of the film, I think the film was done very well and people liked it so much. And it also gives me courage that I did something that people can look at. ... So what I did was very important and people will remember me for that. 'When Veronica was alive this is what she did'. So it's a great honour to me. (Interview with Veronica Kapumburu June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

The film's premiere took place on May 27<sup>th</sup> 2011 at the MITC's canteen with around 35 attendants. The idea was to thank those who had contributed to the filmmaking and to get the head(wo)men's approval before screening the film in their respective villages. We thus invited the head(wo)men and VDC chair persons of each village, as well as the protagonists and a number of other individuals who had directly contributed to the project. We started preparing the event in the late afternoon by setting up a projection unit and rows of plastic chairs, much as in an improvised cinema hall. In the late afternoon, just before sunset, Robert Mukuya began picking up the guests from the surrounding villages in the project car. When our guests had gathered, dressed up smartly, the atmosphere became festive and full of expectation. Before the screening I

gave a short speech on the project, thanking everyone for their support. The film was well received by the protagonists and the head(wo)men. A highlight of the evening was the distribution of certificates, which the workshop participants had requested. The evidence of official approval of their participation was extremely important to them, and they proudly posed to be photographed with these documents. After this formal part of the event, we rearranged the room and everyone gathered around tables where we offered drinks and a dinner. People ate, drank, chatted and joked in a relaxed and wanton atmosphere until we drove them all back home just before midnight. Our guests as well as the participants were extremely satisfied and the premiere of our film was felt to have been a great success.



Figure 30: Posing with their certificates: Thobias, Clementine and Samwel

On the following evenings, from May 28<sup>th</sup> until May 31<sup>st</sup> 2011, the participants organised village screenings to present the film to their respective communities, first in Mupapama, and then in Mashare, Tyeje and finally Muroro. Except for the evening at Muroro, the screenings were rather similar in terms of the order of events and the overall atmosphere. The workshop members from the respective village planned and hosted the event. They selected a site for the screening,

usually outside the head(wo)man's house, and invited all community members to attend. On the scheduled day, the team of facilitators and two or three participants from other villages joined them in the late afternoon. Together we set up the equipment: a power generator, a video projector, a pair of loudspeakers and a laptop. As an improvised screen, we attached a white bedsheet to a tree or a fence. Once we finished arranging everything, we played Namibian pop music over the sound system in order to attract more people. During the following half hour or so the villagers would gather and chat with each other or dance to the music. The elders usually took seats on chairs and benches they had brought along from their households, whereas the majority of the sixty to eighty persons who attended these events would either sit on the ground or stand around the screen in a wide semicircle.

At nightfall, the hosting participants gave a short opening speech, introducing their attending co-filmmakers from the other villages and briefly describing the way we had worked. This was followed by an extension of thanks to the film's protagonists, the attending elders and the entire community. After Mukuya, Sinkumba and I had each added a few words, we started the screening. The film's intro song was a first highlight for the viewers. Many of them spontaneously started clapping their hands and dancing. People were excited to see their family members and neighbours onscreen and made jokes and comments throughout the film. While the *Manketti* and fishing sequences were usually accompanied by amusement and laughter, most people were mesmerised by the *Mahangu* sequence and listened closely to the experts' statements. After the screenings, the production team invited the attending protagonists to come forward and thanked them again for their help. When we asked the audience for questions and comments, there was little response. Most people said that they liked "everything" about the film but found it too short. As it was dark and cold at night during that season, the crowds dispersed shortly after the screenings.





Figure 31: Village screening at Mupapama

While I had expected somewhat bigger audiences, protagonists and participants were happy with the turnout, and visibly enjoyed the events. As I had anticipated from previous public screenings in the Kavango, people did not discuss the film much immediately after the screenings. In order to generate discussion about the various questions raised by the film it would have been necessary to use other methods, such as discussions moderated by the filmmakers or the protagonists, as has been affirmed by the aforementioned *Steps for the Future* film programme (see Levine & Englehart 2003) as well as our own experiences with previous films. Nevertheless, the popularity of the resource sequences during these screenings clearly suggests that an observational approach is well suited for such contexts. The participants received a great deal of positive feedback in the following days and were asked to organise further screenings in their villages:

People were surprised. They did not expect this. I don't know what they were expecting but not this, because they did not understand what we were doing and did not even think that they will see us in the film, so they were surprised. Even now they are still asking for rescreening because those who attended the screenings told the others and they want to see this for themselves as well. (Interview with Johannes Mashare June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

In contrast to the previous screenings, the final presentation, in Muroro, was poorly attended, and from the beginning the spectators seemed to react rather less favourably. This was surprising, since the workshop participant from Muroro, Christofine, had advertised the event well in advance and expected a big crowd. Before the film started, Christofine made only a short and reserved speech, eliciting little response, though she had presented herself in a self-reliant and engaging way during all the other village screenings. As opposed to the previous evenings, during which the protagonists from the respective village had presented themselves proudly, the protagonists from Muroro, Siwana Nekongo and Stephanus Ihemba, did not attend the event. I was irritated, but did not comprehend what had happened until a few days later, when Christofine explained during an interview that the screening had been boycotted:

... this guy asked me why he was not invited to the [premiere] party. ... And it's him that told the others [villagers] not to come to the screening and those that listened to him did not come. ... I live in the village and I know how these people here operate. They are people that he has an influence on. And he told them that we are not good people because we left him out. (Interview Christofine Zangata; June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

I was shocked by Christofine's report, as the call for boycott was not only aimed at our film but first and foremost against her personally. I offered to talk to either the agitator (whom none of the facilitators knew) or to the responsible headman of Mashare to ask him to arbitrate. However, Christofine rejected our support, arguing that such an intervention might stir up the conflict further. At the same time she was confident that the problem would either right itself or could be solved internally.<sup>102</sup> At the time I did not find out anything more about the situation, as Christofine had asked us not to enquire about the issue in her village and I had to leave soon afterwards. According to Christofine's account, the MITC worker had agitated against the screening on the grounds that he had

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<sup>102</sup> The appropriate way for her to address the issue would have been to inform headman Haididi's representative in Muroro, but apparently this was not necessary. Raphael Sinkumba informed me that the covert attacks against Christofine never continued after this event and that she is still engaged in TFO activities (instant message September 26<sup>th</sup> 2012).



not been invited to our premiere party. However, such an explanation seems to suggest a rather disproportionately small reason for such behaviour, and, more generally, is also very one-sided. I see the aggression rather in the context of Christofine's active and self-sufficient role in the film and its making. A big film screening with her as the main protagonist would certainly have raised her prestige in the village.

Either way, the incident alludes to notions of participatory filmmaking as a resource – be it economic, cultural, social or more specifically political. Such an interpretation is supported by the head(wo)men's earlier efforts to include their family members and friends in our production team, and by accounts of indigenous media as contributing to the internal struggle for political power (see Turner 1992). Whereas allegations of favouritism and rumours of secret payments had been reported by the participants since their recruitment, they confirmed that such phenomena are not restricted to filmmaking but are a daily aspect of village life.<sup>103</sup>

Veronica: They just talk, and people are just envious that's how we are, we don't say this is good or bad.

Martin: Do you personally suffer from envy?

Veronica: No I don't. It's not so serious and I don't mind what people say because everyone has their lives to live. I go there alone even if they talk it won't affect me. (Interview with Veronica Kapumburu June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

Despite the unfortunate event at Muroro, most village screenings in the Mashare Area did generate positive audience response, suggesting that the film has the potential for local people to relate to it. How exactly this takes place, and in what contexts and ways people identify with and appropriate the film can only be assessed after further research on the film's reception. The subject of the change of opinion in the communities toward a more positive evaluation of the

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<sup>103</sup> This view is supported by Michael Pröpper, who perceives "envy" as a driving force of social life in the region, which is boosted by increasing consumerism and social stratification effected by the spread of market economy (personal communication on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

film after the end result had been witnessed was also raised during the interviews with the participants:

That was a new thing in the community and people take time to accept new things in their lives ... and now that it's finished and they have seen what we were doing all the time, they will like me because I don't have any enemies here. They thought I was wasting my time when I was doing this. (Interview with Veronica Kapumburu June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

Notwithstanding this broader view, rumours and resentments within the communities were probably fuelled by the biased recruitment and our strategy of not discussing the possibility of compensation for the workshop participants openly. We had asked people to volunteer, but it had always been envisaged that we would make them a gift after the completion of the workshop. When I eventually gave each participant 500 Namibian Dollars<sup>104</sup> as a “sign of appreciation”, the participants decided unanimously that this should not be made public, so they would not have to share it with their protagonists or with their kin and friends. Paradoxically, the payment thus confirmed and possibly reinforced rumours of secret payments. If negative feelings towards the filmmakers or the entire project prevail within the communities, the potential for widespread support of the film through identification with its protagonists and its makers seems limited. In order to minimise allegations and rumours, a transparent and comprehensible recruitment of participants is favourable, as outlined in Chapter 6.2. In addition, it might be appropriate to consider offering a financial compensation to both participants and protagonists in exchange for their time and energy. This becomes mandatory if the filmmaking keeps participants from their usual means of income generation, and in production contexts characterised by great economic imbalances.<sup>105</sup> Alternatively or additionally, a gift could be provided to the entire community, for example a new borehole or

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<sup>104</sup> The amount equals approximately 50 Euro, and was roughly equivalent to the monthly salary of a farm worker.

<sup>105</sup> As opposed to productions in which the participants are financially independent, or in which the workshop is part of their work, as was the case in *Bridging the Gap*.

free food during public village screenings.<sup>106</sup> Possible compensation must be considered very carefully; most importantly, the nature and amount of such compensation should be discussed and agreed upon publicly before or during the recruitment in order to counteract the possibility of rumours.

After my return to Germany, I was asked by the TFO management to present the film to other project members and tell them about my experiences. My impression was that they were not only interested in the film but also wanted to be informed about the area, as I was among the first project members who had conducted long-term research there. When I screened the film, on the evening of June 16<sup>th</sup> 2011 at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Hamburg, around 20 persons attended the event. Their feedback after the film was ambivalent. Some found it informative and interesting as it contained information on agricultural issues that was new to them. Many audience members were impressed with the detailed knowledge of the land-users. Others argued that the film lacked contextual information and depth. Yet others thought that it constructed a distorted or romanticised image of the local situation, as the focus on subsistence farming and natural resources neglected other forms of income or even outside influences. Many of the viewers made suggestions on how to improve the film. The audience did not seem to be fully aware that the film was intended as a representation of particular local perspectives, rather than an “objective” or “neutral” documentation by an outsider. Nevertheless the film quickly became part of the project’s communication: embedded for public viewing on the TFO homepage and published on DVD for distribution to project-partners, reviewers and donors. Importantly in this context, Peter Ian Crawford (1995) reminds us that films used within such contexts may serve the interests of the funding bodies rather than the participants and therefore should be closely monitored.

Most importantly, the workshop participants confirmed that the filmmaking had been an inspiring and rewarding experience for them; one that was felt to be a

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<sup>106</sup> One has to be aware that such “public” compensations may be as complicated and problematic. For example in the case of a borehole, the questions of location and access could be matters of dispute.

contribution to their personal development. The participants highlighted two aspects of the workshop as outstanding: the interactions within the workshop and the filming:

I enjoyed most the training and we all understood what we were taught and the workshop went really well, ... and the communication was really good amongst us – there were no arguments or dominance that one should only speak and others should do what she or he says. We all decided on things as a group. (Interview with Angeline Simata June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011)

Most interesting was using the camera and watching the images you filmed to see the different frames. And there is nothing that was not interesting because we were taught and it was my first time to sit in a workshop. (Interview with Veronica Kapumburu June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

While the participants' choices were constrained and influenced by various factors, such as the institutional framework, my personal preferences and the appropriation of aspects of the film by other powerful stakeholders, the workshop participants made important directorial decisions and shot the film largely themselves. Most significantly, they perceived the outcome as meaningful, and clearly as their own work.

I was very happy to see my own product and to show it to people as well. Because some of them did not know why we were always going there and what we were doing. That [the film] was a history that I did and people will remember me for that. (Interview with Johannes Mashare June 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

The high level of identification was confirmed in all the interviews I conducted with the participants. It shows that participation does not necessarily mean that a film is made entirely by the participants or that the facilitators' input is minimised or made invisible. At best, each individual takes over those aspects of the production that are most interesting or meaningful to him or her. Participatory filmmaking is best conceived as a space in which participants and facilitators experiment together and learn from one another, blurring the boundaries between participants and facilitators, researchers and researched. The experience of making *Liparu Lyetu* suggests that this is possible even within a rather narrowly predefined framework.

## **6.6. Summary**

The filmmaking leading to *Liparu Lyetu* proved to be a dynamic and complex process involving various stakeholders at different levels. Below I summarise the production within the context of the framework derived and applied in Chapters Three and Four, and evaluate the filmmaking in reference to my earlier productions.

### **6.6.1. Initiative and Focus**

Participatory filmmaking for TFO was initiated and shaped by researchers from outside the project area. Guided by the funding body's call for transdisciplinary research as well as our respective professional backgrounds and research interests, Thomas Falk and I determined the aims and the methodological approach of the proposed filmmaking during the project's application phase. Codified in the project proposal, the aim was to make films together with local stakeholders. The members of a production workshop, the precise nature of which would still have to be defined, would take over significant aspects of the film's conception, direction and practical implementation. The project's emphasis on communication and broad audience, coupled with my interest in an observational filmmaking approach, required a high level of direction on my part that would simultaneously limit the degree of control that the participants could exert over the project. However, these were guiding principles rather than a rigid framework. Many important tasks, such as the recruitment of participants, the film's conception and the workshop design were developed together with Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba, after I had arrived in Namibia.

Access to the film workshop was restricted to a small group of villagers from the Mashare Area. Our strategy was to select half of the workshop participants ourselves and ask local traditional leaders for assistance in selecting the other half. However, the head(wo)men quickly appropriated the whole selection process and channelled their own associates into the production team. While this can be seen as a sign of initiative and participation on behalf of the traditional

authorities, it resulted in a biased production team. Filmmaking was obviously a contested resource from which many people felt excluded – which is almost impossible to avoid if only a limited number of people can participate in the actual film production. In order to guard against allegations of favouritism it is useful to organise the recruitment as broadly and transparently as possible and include as many societal institutions as possible. This is a complex and time-consuming process that might not fit into the time scales of applied research.

The initiative in the making of *Liparu Lyetu* resided largely with outsiders and it certainly would have changed the entire process if we had discussed possible outcomes and products together with the participants at an earlier stage. At the same time, this was largely impossible within the institutional context. Firstly, because funding and application procedures necessitated a rigid project outline, with certain outcomes that had to be predefined in order to secure funding. Secondly, the film's emphasis on communication and broad audiences limited the choices. Thirdly, the time-frame made a lengthy decision-making process regarding the project's outcome impossible.

### **6.6.2. Participant Input**

During the production I occupied an important position, shaping the process of filmmaking, most significantly through devising and moderating the workshop, by guiding the filming, and in editing the film. In the following, I summarise how different groups of stakeholders contributed to the production.

1. The local co-workers, Robert Mukuya and Raphael Sinkumba, were deeply involved in the conception of the film workshop and took over important practical aspects of training, moderation and filmmaking. Their inclusion as co-facilitators rather than assistants constituted a significant shift in authority from that characterising a more overtly hierarchical configuration, blurring the boundaries between insiders/outsiders and facilitators/participants. I consider the inclusion of locals in the production/facilitation team as an important aspect of participatory filmmaking. However, the degree to which Mukuya and Sinkumba

participated was the result of a long-lasting relationship, which gave them the necessary knowledge and skills and which had established the required trust on both sides.

2. A number of TFO researchers, local development workers and politicians participated indirectly, by offering their opinions and advice during the project's pre-investigation phase. I conducted interviews with these stakeholders not only to elicit background information on the Mashare Area, but also to formally include them into the process of filmmaking. While their priorities and directives were not directly implemented in the film, two points emerged out of these interviews. On one hand, the TFO members affirmed the importance of film for project communication. On the other hand, our interviews with politicians and decision-makers in the pre-investigation phase indirectly led to their later inclusion as interviewees in the film.
3. The inhabitants of the research area were supposed to participate in the project by determining the film's focus and by designating representatives as workshop participants and protagonists in the film. However, the strategy of including a wide cross-section of the public in these decisions through the use of community meetings failed, as few people attended and the head(wo)men dominated these gatherings. Our strategy was obviously based on an incorrect conception of those communities as homogenous and conflict-free entities. This resulted in the inclusion of the traditional authorities and their entourages, rather than the wider public. Even though it would have been inappropriate to attempt to bypass the traditional leaders it might have been possible to achieve more public support by involving a variety of institutions.
4. The members of the production team participated in the filmmaking in many ways. One of their first tasks was to agree on the film's focus, which resulted in the decision to introduce three areas of resource use. As the film's directors, they conceptualised the resource sequences, recruited the protagonists, devised interview questions and organised the shoots.

During the filming, the participants communicated with the protagonists and operated the camera largely on their own. Later they chose the interviewees, devised interview questions, and conducted and filmed the “expert” interviews. Finally, the workshop participants devised and performed a song and filmed one another for the film’s introduction. One of the participants, Christofine Zangata, was selected to improvise the film’s commentary under the auspices of the group. Although the workshop facilitators provided continual input, the film’s footage was produced almost entirely by or in close collaboration with the participants who also made the selection of dialogues and interview extracts to be included into the film. The fact that they personally appeared in the film was important to the participants. Perhaps most significantly, despite the inherent limitations, the participants regarded the film as their own product, and presented it to their communities accordingly.

5. Both protagonists and interviewees participated in the filmmaking, mainly through their interaction and their negotiations during the filming. The fact that the filmmakers and protagonists were equally inexperienced resulted in a great deal of experimentation and the blurring of conventional boundaries between filmmakers and filmed. Specially arranged and re-enacted for the filming, the resource sequences resulted in markedly conscious performances, much as in ethnofictional filmmaking. Locally inspired forms of self-presentation, performance and argumentation further contributed to an experimental performative space that allowed the transfer of a significant level of agency to protagonists.

In summary I would argue that both participants and facilitators authored the film together; not, it must be reiterated, equally or entirely collaboratively, but in diverse ways according to their various roles, temperaments and competencies. This is reflected in the film’s end titles, in which the entire production team is



credited with authorship.<sup>107</sup> Beyond their measurable contribution, the participants identified with the film as their own work. However, the film and its making are not the only spheres that should be taken into account when judging participation. If the aim of the filming is to involve the participants in research or development projects as postulated in the project proposal, it is necessary to assess the different ways in which the film feeds back into the research, into public awareness or into policy considerations in order to fully evaluate its scope. In order to address these issues, it would be necessary to conduct ethnographic research on TFO and its role in the Mashare Area and beyond.

### **6.6.3. Mutuality and Benefits**

Robert Mukuya, Raphael Sinkumba and myself benefited from the filmmaking largely as we had in the previous projects. The filmmaking was an aspect of our work, generating an income and forming part of our professional experience, potentially enhancing our positions in the job market. My own position in the project was certainly an improvement as compared to my situation as a freelancer. The temporary employment through TFO gave me a fixed salary for two years and the possibility of gaining formal qualifications through completing a PhD. Apart from the professional considerations, the three of us perceived the filmmaking as an interesting and worthwhile experience, contributing to our personal development and potentially to the accumulation of reputation and prestige in the non-professional sphere.

The workshop participants saw their activities as personally beneficial, as is clearly expressed in their interviews with me. The vocational training aspect was important to them, a point confirmed by their insistence on being issued

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<sup>107</sup>The end titles of *Liparu Lyetu* commence with the words “A film by” followed by the names of the entire production team in alphabetical order (Gruber et al. 2011: 30:50-31:02). Later in the credits, as well as on the DVD cover, the core tasks of the filming are differentiated, with the participants credited with the direction and shooting, and the facilitators with co-direction and editing.

certificates of participation.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the participants argued that their activities and the resulting film would have a positive impact on their positions in their communities, affirming the notion of filmmaking as a social or cultural resource. The amount of 500 Namibian Dollars that each participant received at the end of the project was perceived as a reasonable and greatly appreciated compensation for the amount of time they had invested. While the payment may be seen as paternalistic, it retroactively integrated the participants into the paid production team, further blurring the predefined roles. Although such a compensation might conceivably raise expectations that are difficult for the project to fulfil, and/or spur feelings of envy within the local communities, I would consider remuneration – and discuss the issue openly – in future projects.

The head(wo)men presented themselves proudly and complacently during our village screenings, and confirmed their contentment with our activities and the resulting product during the parting visits I paid them immediately before I left. Due to their public support of the project, they were associated with the film, and gained prestige from the public attention it received. At the same time, they managed to channel their kin and associates into the production team, further strengthening their positions within their communities. While the support of traditional leaders was an important requirement for the implementation of TFO, their participation in the filmmaking reinforced existing power relations on a local level.

Without direct participation in the filmmaking, the vast majority of people in the Mashare Area were meant to benefit from the filmmaking indirectly. Screenings within the production areas were supposed to foster the sense of cultural identity and cohesion within the group. The fact that the local people were communicating “their” knowledge and “their” concerns within the project was intended to contribute to research results and policy commendations, with a resulting positive impact on their livelihoods. Screenings of the film to broad audiences in Namibia and beyond were aimed at creating appreciation for their

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<sup>108</sup> The only workshop member that I know of whose participation has impacted directly on his job situation is Samwel Kwandu, who has since been working as a research assistant for other TFO members (Raphael Sinkumba; instant message October 26<sup>th</sup> 2012).

way of life, and to raise awareness about the situation of small-scale farmers, which might result in policy changes contributing to their wellbeing. While it is generally difficult to assess the impact of such projects, especially in the longer term, I do perceive the increased visibility of those marginalised actors, both within the commissioning project and beyond, as advantageous for the people of the Mashare Area.

The Future Okavango research project benefited considerably from participatory filmmaking. The attention and awareness generated locally through our activities are an important asset to the project, as is the support of the head(wo)men and local decision-makers gained through their participation in and appropriation of the process. Moreover, the film was immediately used to enhance TFO project's self-presentation on the internet. DVD copies were distributed to project partners and colleagues. Finally, the external reviewers highlighted the film in a positive light during an evaluation of the project in December 2011. Filmmaking contributed to TFO, in accord with the intention expressed in the project proposal.

#### **6.6.4. Evaluation**

In order to facilitate an assessment of the making of *Liparu Lyetu* I have disclosed the processes of production, highlighting the questions of initiative, the involvement of various groups of participants, and the ways in which the different parties benefitted from their engagement. In the following, I evaluate the film with reference to the three films discussed earlier, discussing aspects of the production process as well as the resulting films.

While all four films discussed above were produced within an applied context and in similar institutional settings, they were guided by fundamentally different aims. In the case of *Wiza Wetu* and *Mema Eparu*, the intention was to raise awareness of certain social phenomena, and the envisaged messages of the films were imposed by the commissioners before the start of the productions. Various participatory methods were introduced in order to make the films (more) accessible and meaningful to local audiences, but also (and very importantly) to

re-adjust the preconceived and pre-set ideas and messages to communicate the social realities of local actors. As for *Bridging the Gap* and *Liparu Lyetu*, the aim of both of these films was first and foremost to give workshop participants the opportunity to express themselves filmically within a loosely defined overall theme. Based on PV methodology (Lunch & Lunch 2006), the underlying idea was that the production would be advantageous for workshop participants and the commissioning bodies. While the two earlier films were commissioned to *raise awareness*, the two later films were intended as *participatory processes*. To draw an analogy with the differentiation highlighted in the development studies above, one could argue that in the earlier films, participation was a *means* by which to achieve a better outcome of the project, whereas participation was an *end* during the production of the two later films (Cleaver 1999).

All the films under discussion are based on participatory methods that have their origins in ethnographic filmmaking, such as that of including the protagonists or representatives of the intended audiences in the films' conception through seeking their advice and consent (Ruby 1991) and the use of re-enactments or other fictionalisations. The films make use of observational filmmaking, an approach that is deeply rooted in anthropology and serves as an inclusion of the protagonists in the research and filming process (MacDougall 1994; Henley 2004). Moreover, local co-workers were deeply involved in the productions, as co-directors of the films and co-facilitators of the workshops rather than simply as research assistants. Initially intended to bridge language barriers and to compensate the limited time frames, their inclusion became a central aspect of the filmmaking.

The two later films are notably distinct from the earlier ones, as responsibility for their conception and technical implementation was widely shifted to workshop participants, who took over important aspects of the production such as deciding on the film's subject matter, devising the narrative approach, recruiting protagonists, directing, and making important editorial decisions. While the workshop leading to the production of *Bridging the Gap* was organised as a training experience for a predefined circle of project members, and therefore took place in a somewhat enclosed social environment, the production of *Liparu Lyetu*

was more complex and demanding, as the filmmaking became a contested resource in a wider social arena. Perhaps most importantly, despite the various restrictions and directions governing the production, the workshop participants obviously did not see themselves as contributing to an externally controlled process, but rather as the (co-)authors of the film. They perceived the film as their own product, suggesting that the workshop design left them enough space to implement the film according to their ideas. The situations in which the preconceived framework and my authority were challenged turned out to be especially important within the workshop as well as in the wider context.

The benefits gained by the filmmakers and local co-workers from their engagement in the project were of a fairly similar kind in each of the cases, and mostly applied in the professional context. Likewise, the protagonists and interviewees involved in all of the films gained a certain amount of public attention that might have had a positive impact on their self-esteem, and possibly on their social position. *Bridging the Gap* and *Liparu Lyetu* are distinctive in that they offered the members of the film workshops more concrete and tangible benefits. Especially in the former case, the workshop was valued in itself as it provided useful and potentially valuable training, enhancing the possibilities for future employment. More generally, participation was seen as an interesting and personally rewarding experience. The perceived advantageousness of participation was made blatantly clear in the latter case in the way in which the access to the film workshop was contested.

Even though this point somewhat deviates from my evaluation framework, I want to conclude with a brief comparison of the resulting films. Tellingly, all the films discussed here “look” very much alike – confirming the strong impact I had as a director and facilitator. They are constructed from a mixture of observational sequences and interviews with different degrees of staging or fictionalisations. With the exception of *Bridging the Gap*, the films place resource users in centre stage and portray them as charismatic, self-aware and knowledgeable personalities. These actors are explicitly or implicitly in opposition to dominant discourses and segments of society, usually represented by politicians,

bureaucrats, traditional leaders, development workers and other so-called experts.

Whereas the two earlier films are permeated by clear messages such as “Do not harvest trees illegally!” or “Do not drink water from the river!” the two later films are less directive. *Bridging the Gap* is first and foremost an idealised self-presentation on the part of the makers. In *Liparu Lyetu* the filmmakers establish themselves as “researchers” – in their quest to communicate something meaningful about their way of life to outside audiences. Within the film, this explorative approach oscillates between being a mere narrative device and an expression of genuine curiosity. The film’s focus is directed toward “traditional” methods of resource use. As confirmed during our village screenings, this focus obviously offers points of reference for local viewers and suggests the film’s potential for the construction of a sense of local cultural identity.

Even though I have argued throughout this dissertation that it is difficult to evaluate the degree of participation involved in any film – and especially to compare across different genres – a tentative comparison of the four films discussed shows that the degree of stakeholder inclusion was certainly most pronounced during the production of *Liparu Lyetu*. This was evident from the start, with the recruitment of the production team and the collective decision-making with regard to the film’s focus, and continued through the workshop design and moderation, which allowed the participants the space required to shape “their own” film, and in the filming of resource sequences, which constituted a dynamic and experimental space leading to the blurring of distinct roles and hierarchies. The limited but decisive reactions of the workshop participants and local audiences on witnessing the finished product suggest that *Liparu Lyetu* was perceived as a genuine local product to a greater extent than had been the case with any of the other films.

### **6.7. Research Outcome: Six Spheres of Participation**

The approach of *participatory ethnographic filmmaking*, which has been a provisional methodology throughout my work, was consolidated and refined

through the research I conducted for TFO. Participatory ethnographic filmmaking is a blend of ethnographic filmmaking and PV methodology. It draws on many participatory aspects of anthropological filmmaking, such as asking protagonists or other stakeholders for their advice and consent, devising the content and form of the film together with them, and engaging in many different kinds of negotiations before, during, and after the filming, in addition to its underlying aim of conveying meaning sensually, for example through the use of an observational approach or fictionalisations. Additionally, inspired by PV methodology (Braden 1998; Lunch & Lunch 2006), both conceptual and practical aspects of the filmmaking are implemented by workshop participants to as great an extent as possible. Within a predefined framework, and as part of a closely guided and moderated process, the participants conceptualise, direct and shoot the films themselves. The workshop constitutes a space in which the participants are able to experiment beyond conventional boundaries and hierarchies. Local elements of storytelling and (self-) presentation contribute to a distinct cinematic style. The filmmaking is seen as a mutual exploration which is guided by anthropological research ethics.

The films are characterised by a high level of reflexivity and take a position in favour of marginalised actors within the given research arena. As the various aims and positions of workshop participants, facilitators and other stakeholders all have to be addressed and, if possible, satisfied, the resulting films may be somewhat heterogeneous. For the commissioning bodies, these films can inform and raise awareness of the social phenomena they depict and of the project itself. For the workshop participants, the filmmaking constitutes an experience, broadening their horizons and contributing to their personal development. Importantly, the films bring the views and perspectives of marginalised actors into the commissioning projects and makes them available to a broader public; the presence and increased visibility of these actors can be seen as an increase in their representational power.

The filmmaking leading to *Liparu Lyetu* was implemented within a complex social and political context. In addition to the previously applied provisional evaluation criteria, I identified six distinct spheres in which participation is negotiated and

takes place. While these spheres overlap and influence each other, it is certainly useful to approach them independently in order to assess the nature and degree of participation involved in a given project. They may serve as a framework for the assessment and analysis of participatory filmmaking in different social and cultural settings within both applied and more academic contexts.

First, participatory filmmaking is planned and predefined within a wide social and political field, the specific conditions of which shape the framework of the filmmaking. In the case of *Liparu Lyetu* this overarching arena was constituted by the funding agency, the various applicants of the TFO research project with their underlying research agendas and institutional backgrounds, and different Namibian and German authorities, represented by researchers, politicians, bureaucrats and other so-called experts. On this level, and before the start of the actual film-project, for the most part sub-project coordinator Thomas Falk and I negotiated the guidelines.

Second, on a community or village level, projects must be implemented within an intricate network of local actors, and inevitably become part of internal struggles over power and resources. Narrowing down the film's focus and recruiting workshop participants are important aspects at this stage. In the Mashare Area, traditional authorities appropriated and largely controlled these steps. While this constituted a shift of control to actors at the local level, it simultaneously reinforced existing hierarchies and counteracted the preconceived idea of a balanced production team. While I have argued for increased transparency and accountability regarding the recruitment, and the possibility of offering compensation to participants in order to guard against such difficulties, such problems are inevitable (especially in situations characterised by social and economic inequality) and have to be managed on a case-by-case basis.

Third, with direct involvement restricted to a relatively small number of persons, the film workshops comprise the central sphere of participation. Shaped and implemented by facilitators, the workshops constitute spaces in which the participants can perform and test new and alternative discourses and activities – possibly in opposition to the intentions of the workshop facilitators. While these



spaces clearly need to be “safe”, or separated from the surrounding power structures, they are also deeply intertwined with the participants’ everyday lives, so that the two spheres shape and influence each other. I want to highlight the combination of consensual and democratic decision-making processes, that resulted in the implementation of solutions supported by the entire group. While consensual decisions in participatory workshops are frequently represented negatively as overriding minority perspectives (Kothari 2004), I perceive this aspect rather positively as fostering cohesion and identification within the group. Contrary to the views expressed by some authors, who consider any short-term interventions to be “temporary carnivalesque arenas” (Kesby 2005: 2059), I see the experience of participating in a film workshop rather as part of an ongoing process of identity-formation and personal development. Throughout the production of *Liparu Lyetu*, the participants perceived the workshop as inspiring and meaningful, highlighting the practical training and filming activities as well as the egalitarian and constructive atmosphere.

Fourth, the actual filming constitutes a separate sphere of participation that incorporates the protagonists in addition to the workshop participants and facilitators. In a situation that is characterised by a heightened precariousness and dedication, the presence of the camera (Rouch 2003; see also Møhl 2011), may trigger interactions between protagonists and filmmakers beyond those circumscribed by conventional roles and hierarchies between observer and observed. The performances may be enhanced through the introduction of a fictional framework or by locally specific manners of presentation and storytelling. My experience during the production of *Liparu Lyetu* suggests that the practical engagement in filmmaking is extremely important to the participants and may contribute to their appropriation of the process. The act of “handing over the camera” thus changes the participants’ perceptions of their roles, and increases the potential for their identification with the film.

Fifth, the filmic space constitutes another sphere of participation. The different actors are audio-visually incorporated into the resulting film. Attributing meaning and status to the individual protagonists in the film and relating them to one another is one significant aspect of the intervention of editing. The editor can

manipulate the representations of certain actors within the film, independent of their input in the production. This can work to counter possible biases in the production team, as has been described above in the example of *Mema Eparu*. Importantly, the observational and fictional approaches convey “corporeal” (MacDougall 2006) knowledge in a way that seems to be meaningful to both broad and local audiences, as my limited experience of screenings suggests. Feedback screenings during the production may be an important participatory element by which to also include wider communities in the process of filmmaking. More generally, when screened before diverse audiences, the participation of protagonists and workshop participants is mediated beyond the context of production.

Finally, the distribution and reception of these films constitutes a sixth sphere of participation. While access to and control over the resulting film has to be negotiated together with the various stakeholders involved in the production, the facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the film may not be used against the interests of protagonists and participants or their communities (see Crawford 1995). Screenings organised by and/or in the presence of the participants and protagonists may increase participation in two additional ways. On the one hand, they further heighten the participants’ sense of ownership of the product. On the other hand, they may facilitate discussions after the screenings and invite the viewers to engage in a more interactive, participatory reception. In the case of *Liparu Lyetu*, the planned screenings to villagers in the other project countries promise to be an especially interesting form of cross-cultural mediation.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Prospects

The main purpose of this dissertation has been to contribute to a methodological discussion and conceptual clarification of participatory filmmaking. The aim was to examine how various participatory methods and approaches drawn from the fields of ethnographic filmmaking, indigenous media and participatory video may contribute to participatory filmmaking within applied contexts, and the ways in which their use may otherwise affect the filmmaking process. To investigate these questions I described and analysed the production of the film *Liparu Lyetu* in the context of my previous work.

Participatory filmmaking – and the idea of participation in general – has become increasingly prominent within ethnographic filmmaking, as well as in research (communication) and development. At the same time, many such projects have been characterised by a lack of methodological clarity. There has been little or no exchange between the different fields, which offer the potential to provide theoretical and methodical insights into participatory filmmaking. With my approach, *participatory ethnographic filmmaking*, it is my aim to present a more solid basis for the discussion and evaluation of such projects.

Combining methods of ethnographic filmmaking with PV, *participatory ethnographic filmmaking* unites multiple aims, audiences and functions intrinsic to the applied context. It is capable of conveying complex situations visually, rather than through words – allowing the viewers to experience certain situations through the interactions between local filmmakers and protagonists. The films resulting from this approach seem to be meaningful and interesting to local and broad audiences alike. I want to highlight three main issues, which seem crucial to any kind of participatory filmmaking in an applied context:

1. My research has strongly affirmed that participatory filmmaking in general is governed by, and to a certain degree reproduces, hierarchies and power relations. These are effective at all levels of the process, though may be hidden and thus difficult to take into account. The short time-

frames offered by applied research contexts make it difficult to discern these structures, and thus there is a need for longer-term fieldwork engagements – as is more usual in academic anthropological research.

2. As the process of filmmaking is highly complex, it has to be guided and controlled in many ways, which seems to contradict the idea of including non-professionals on mutual terms. The role of the facilitators becomes extremely important in the case of filmmaking – with the risk that participants may become mere attendants in an outsider-led process. The moments in which the facilitators' authority is challenged are therefore of critical importance. They make the boundaries defining established roles and hierarchies more permeable, and facilitate the participants' appropriation of the process and the resulting film. I have discussed a number of these situations in which my authority was questioned, whether in the open or more covertly; for example during the recruitment phase, or in the context of the "expert" interviews of *Liparu Lyetu*. Conflicts between facilitators and participants, and the way in which they are solved, seem to be of great importance for the negotiation of power relations within the workshop and possibly beyond.
3. My research emphasises the significance of the resulting films, not only for the funding bodies, facilitators and participant-filmmakers, but also for the participatory process. Films mediate between the parties involved in their making and their diverse audiences. However, during their distribution and reception, films develop their own "lives", beyond the control of the production team. The films may reinforce or challenge existing power relations and stereotypes amongst the viewers. The openness of participatory ethnographic film to interpretation makes it difficult to predict potential readings of the films or other possible related outcomes, especially in cross-cultural contexts. However, the reception of these films (as with ethnographic films more generally) is largely unexplored, and warrants careful consideration.

While this research has the potential to contribute considerably to the discussion of participatory filmmaking from a visual anthropological perspective, it has to be acknowledged that it was restricted by various factors. Limited time in the field due to the overall project schedule made it impossible to gather additional information on either the social and cultural contexts of *Liparu Lyetu*, or its reception. Moreover, it was difficult to develop in-depth relationships with the participants and protagonists and to contextualise the filmmaking within their everyday life-worlds and interactions. However, the fact that all of the discussed films were produced in the same local context and in cooperation with the same two experienced co-workers allowed the possibility for dense discussion and analysis. It will be interesting to experiment further with this method when it is applied to new contexts.

On the basis of my research and filmmaking, I have developed a framework that includes six spheres of participation: 1. the broader institutional and socio-political sphere; 2. the local context; 3. the workshop situation; 4. the space constituted by the situation of shooting; 5. the filmic space; and 6. that of the films' distribution and reception. This framework may serve as a useful conceptual template or guide for the discussion and evaluation of participatory films, as well as for the implementation and development of new projects.

Developed and implemented within applied contexts, *participatory ethnographic filmmaking* can also serve as a method by which to approach and explore a wide range of topics within anthropological research. Based on negotiations between different local actors and researchers-facilitators, the resulting films constitute a specific shared or mutually agreed perspective on a given phenomenon, to be interpreted and analysed in the context of its production. Such processes can unfold at a more profound level in situations with less restrictions and longer time-frames, allowing the researchers the freedom to gather thorough knowledge of the local context, to develop in-depth relationships with people who live there, and to adapt their research agenda accordingly. Under such conditions, participatory ethnographic filmmaking offers a coherent basis for experimental approaches to anthropological research and filmmaking. It allows the reflexive exploration of diverse social and cultural phenomena within the context of the

power structures in which they are embedded. Through the use of more intentional fictionalisations, the adoption of various narrative strategies, and the exploration of different genres, the participants may experiment with a variety of roles, and negotiate opposing and possibly counter-dominant positions that are difficult to discuss more openly in everyday spaces. In this way, the cooperation between an “outsider” anthropologist and a number of local participant-filmmakers can open new and alternative perspectives within anthropological research.

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## **9. Filmography**

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1989 The Kayapo: Out of the Forest. 51 mins. Brazil & Great Britain:

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2009 Avatar. 162 mins. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

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1960 Primary. 60 mins. USA: docurama films.

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2009 Altamira–Belo Monte Dam. 3:29 mins. Great Britain: Indigenous Peoples Cultural Support Trust.

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2002 Sleeping Rough. 43 mins. Germany: gruberfilm.

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**Immanuel, Veronica Ngundi Kapumburu, Samwel T. Kwandu,  
Johannes Mashare, Robert Mukuya, Angeline K. Simata, Raphael  
Sinkumba & Christofine Zangata**

2011 Liparu Lyetu – Our Life. 32 mins. Namibia, Germany: University of Bremen.

**Gruber, Martin & Michaela Schäuble**

2009 Faces of Aging. 36 mins. Germany: gruberfilm.

**Gruber, Martin & Raphael Sinkumba**

2008 Mema Eparu - Water Is Life. 35 mins. Namibia, Germany: Lux-Development.

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1972 To Live with Herds. 66 mins. USA: Royal Anthropological Institute.

1993 Tempus De Baristas. 100 mins. United Kingdom: Royal Anthropological Institute.

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**MacDougall, David & Judith MacDougall**

1980a Familiar Places. 90 mins. Australia: Royal Anthropological Institute.

1980b Takeover. 87 mins. Australia: Royal Anthropological Institute.

1981 A Wife Amongst Wives. 75 mins. USA: Royal Anthropological Institute.

1991 Photo Wallahs. 60 mins. United Kingdom: Royal Anthropological Institute.

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2001 A Fighting Spirit. 32 mins. Zimbabwe: Steps for the Future.

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2006 We Struggle but We Eat Fruit. 40 mins. Brazil: Video in the Villages.

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2007 Wiza Wetu! - Our Forest. 53 mins. Namibia, Germany: BIOTA Africa.

**Pugliese, Ella & Nou Va**

2009 We Want (U) to Know. 90 mins. Cambodia: The Khmer Institute for Democracy.

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1954 Les Maitres Fous. 35 mins. Ghana: DER.

1959 Moi Un Noir. 73 mins. Ivory Coast: Editions Montparnasse.

1967 Jaguar. 88 mins. Niger, Ghana: Editions Montparnasse.

**Rouch, Jean & Edgar Morin**

1961 Chronique D'un Été. 90 mins. France: Arte Vidéo.

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Donna Kotze, Marianna Johanna Lot, Snake Vilho Mtuleni, Robert S.  
Mukuya, Weynand Pieters, Jeanette Swartbooi & Sebedeus  
Swartbooi**

2009 Bridging the Gap. Para-Ecologists in Avtion. 20 mins. South Africa,  
Germany: BIOTA Africa.

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2009 Land Matters. 64 mins. Namibia: Namibiana Buchdepot.

**Sjöberg, Johannes**

2007 Transfiction. 58 mins. Brazil, United Kingdom: Manchester University.

**Young, Ben & Olisarali Olibui**

2009 Shooting with Mursi. 57 mins. United Kingdom & Ethiopia: Democracy, Growth and Peace Pastoralists.

## **10. Appendices**

## 10.1. Appendix I: Workshop programme

### **The Future Okavango Participatory Film Workshop**

by

Martin Gruber, Robert Mukuya & Raphael Sinkumba  
Workshop Programme Part 1

Monday 18.4.2011

Morning (9:00-13:00)	Afternoon (14:00-17:00)
Welcome Introduction of participants Introduction of the project Brainstorming: focus of film Introduction to documentary film	Introduction to the camera Camera exercise: short interview

Tuesday 19.4.2011

Morning (9:00-13:00)	Afternoon (14:00-17:00)
General feedback Feedback camera exercise Group work: discussion about topics Presentation of group work Questions about filmmaking	Interview Team work: Develop Interview questions Camera exercise: interviews

Wednesday 20.4.2011

Morning (9:00-13:00)	Afternoon (14:00-17:00)
General feedback Feedback camera exercise Market of topics	How to film activities Group 1: Camera Exercise: filming activities Group 2 development of the group's sequence

Thursday 21.4.2011

Morning (9:00-13:00)	Afternoon (14:00-17:00)
Group 2: Camera Exercise: filming activities Group 2 focus of the group's sequence Evaluation of footage	Planning the shooting General questions Evaluation of first workshop part

## The Future Okavango Participatory Film Production

by  
Martin Gruber, Robert Mukuya & Raphael Sinkumba  
Workshop Programme Part 2

Tuesday 3.5.2011

Morning (8:00-12:00)	Afternoon (13:00-16:00)
Groups 1,2&3 report on their research	Groups 1,2 &3 present their shooting plan Feedback regarding film exercise

Wednesday 4.5.2011

Morning (9:00-12:00)	Afternoon (13:00-16:00)
Shooting group 1	Shooting group 1

Thursday 5.5.2011

Morning (9:00-12:00)	Afternoon (13:00-16:00)
Shooting group 1	Shooting group 2

Friday 6.5.2011

Morning (9:00-12:00)	Afternoon (13:00-16:00)
Shooting group 2	Shooting group 2

Monday 9.5.2011

Morning (9:00-12:00)	Afternoon (13:00-16:00)
Shooting group 3	Shooting group 3

Tuesday 10.5.2011

Morning (9:00-12:00)	Afternoon (13:00-16:00)
Shooting group 3	Groups 1,2 &3 report from their shooting Further discussion

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Group 1:

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Group 2:

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Group 3:

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## **10.2. Appendix II: “Expert” Interviews – Brainstorming and Questionnaires**

### **10.2.1. Councillor of Mashare**

#### **Brainstorming Group 1**

1. Are you aware of the complaints regarding subsistence farming in your constituency?
2. What is the procedure to get employed in your office?
3. What is the problem with birth certificates?
4. What is the problem in our village? People are volunteering. In other villages people get jobs.
5. What advice do you give the people in your constituency?

#### **Brainstorming Group 2**

1. What will you do for the people who voted for you?
2. Which problems are you facing regarding development in your constituency?
3. How do you work together regarding development with the people in your constituency?
4. How do you see the role of agriculture in your constituency?
5. What advice are you giving to the people to eradicate poverty?

#### **Final Questionnaire (Interviewers: Christofine, Veronica)**

1. What role do natural resources play for the communities in your constituency?
2. How do you see the future of agriculture in your constituency?
3. How do you work together regarding development with the people in your constituency?
4. Are you aware of the problems of subsistence farmers in your constituency regarding
  - a. Ploughing?
  - b. Lack of Fertilizer?
5. What advice are you giving to the people to eradicate poverty?



## 10.2.2. Agricultural Extension Officer

### Brainstorming Group 1

1. How do you grow maize so that it gives better harvest?
2. How is it possible that *Mahangu* grows differently on the same soil type?
3. What is the difference between clay soil and sandy soil?
4. Why is the soil fertility on some fields good for many years and other fields turn bad in few years?
5. What does the soil need to be fertile?
6. What is the purpose of green scheme and what does it offer?
7. What assistance do we get from your office?

### Brainstorming Group 2

1. How do you compare this year's harvest to the last year's?
2. What is the difference between the traditional *Mahangu* seeds and the modified seeds?
3. Is there some assistance that you give to subsistence farmers?
4. What encouragements do you give to the subsistence farmers to improve their harvest?

### Final Questionnaire (Interviewers: Thobias, Angeline, Samwel)

1. How is this year's harvest to the last year's?
2. What is the difference between the traditional *Mahangu* seeds and the improved seeds?
3. How is it possible that the same *Mahangu* grows differently on the same soil type? Which factors influence the soil fertility? How can the soil fertility be improved?
4. How is it possible the soil fertility on some fields good for many years and other fields turn bad in a few years?
5. What is the purpose of green schemes and what do they offer to subsistence farmers?
6. Which assistance that you give to subsistence farmers?

### **10.2.3. Department of Fisheries**

#### **Brainstorming Group 1**

1. Last year there were many dead and wounded fish in the river. What might have been the cause?
2. Which restrictions regarding the amount of fish allowed to catch are there?
3. What are the laws regarding fishery are there?
4. Why do you need permits for fishnets?
5. What is the difference between the fish in the sewerage and the one in the river?
6. What advice does your office give to the people?

#### **Brainstorming Group 2**

1. What is the function of your ministry?
2. Which fishing methods are restricted by your department and why?
3. How do you work with the people catching fish alongside the river?
4. What is the purpose of aqua cultures?
5. How does the pollution affect the fish in the river?

#### **Final Questionnaire (Interviewers: Johannes, Clementine)**

1. What is the function of your department?
2. Which fishing methods are restricted by your department and why?
3. Which restrictions regarding the amount of fish allowed to catch are there?
4. Why do you need permits for fishnets?
5. What other laws regarding fishery are there?
6. Last year there were many dead and wounded fish in the river. What might have been the cause?
7. What is the difference between the fish in the sewerage and the one in the river?
8. How does the pollution affect the fish in the river?

9. How do you work with the people catching fish alongside the river?
10. What is an aqua culture? How does it work?
11. What advice does your office give to the people?

#### **10.2.4. NNF**

##### **Brainstorming Group 1**

1. What is the meaning of NNF?
2. What does NNF do?
3. Why are the chicken and guinea fowls and the garden only in Mupapama?  
How does community benefit?
4. What assistance can we get from NNF?
5. How can your office assist the people?

##### **Brainstorming Group 2**

1. What is NNF?
2. What assistance is your project giving to the villagers?
3. Since this project started, how did the communities benefit?
4. Before a person is given any assistance by your project, what are the requirements?
5. What changes has NNF brought to the villagers?

##### **Final Questionnaire (Interviewers: Johannes, Christofine, Clementine)**

1. What is NNF? Can you introduce your activities especially in the Mashare Area?
2. Last year there were many dead and wounded fish in the river. What might have been the cause?
3. How do you judge the water quality? How can we improve it?
4. How do upstream activities influence the downstream people?
5. How can we dispose our waste so the environment will not suffer?

## **Declaration in Lieu of Oath**

Martin Gruber

This is to confirm that I authored this thesis myself. It was compiled without recourse to any unauthorised material. No materials or references other than those cited were used. Those sections that are quoted or referenced from other pieces of work are clearly marked. I additionally assert that this thesis has not been part of any other examination process.

Bremen, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015

Signature: .....